

人類は衰退しました

平常運転

田中 ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑

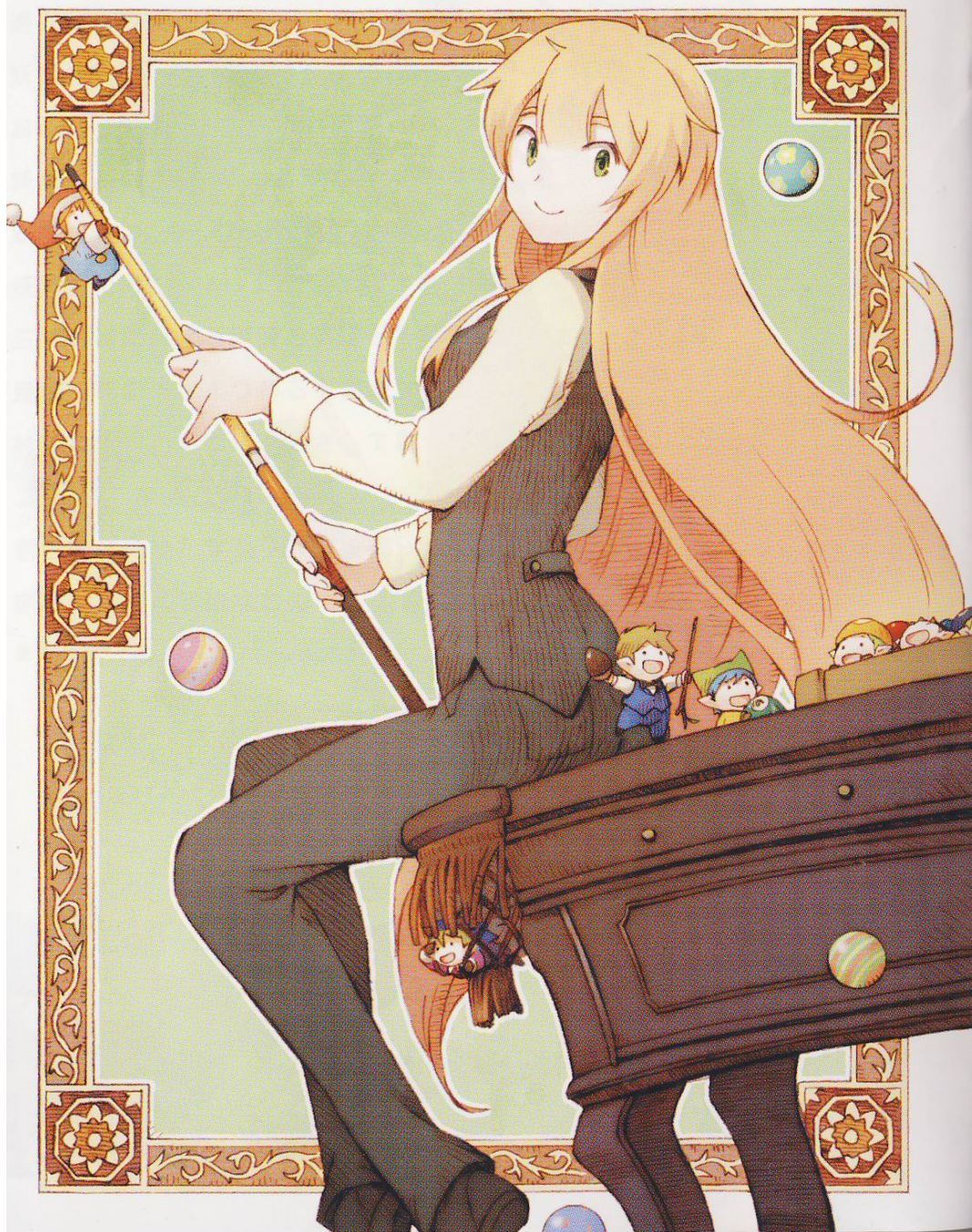


GAGAGA

人類は衰退しました 平常運転

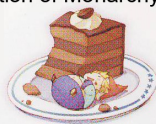
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Sometimes
even I do
good things,
you know?



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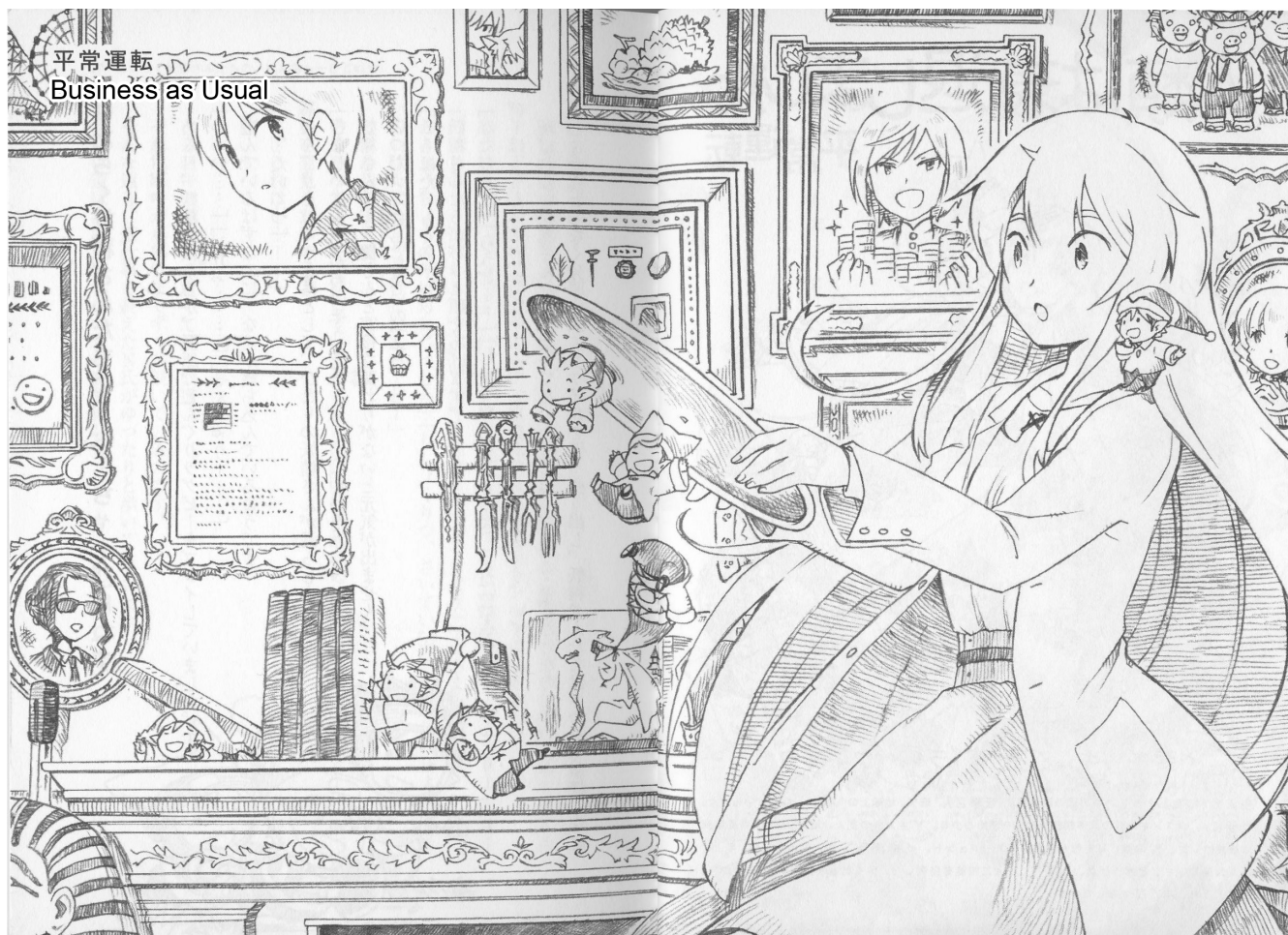
Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Assistant-san** a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, **Y** a girl the same age as Protagonist. Slender of face and physique, an attractive silver-haired lady. **K** an UN agent dressed in black clothes. **Curly Hair** A girl who went to the same school as the Protagonist. She's attached the older girl and calls her 'onee-san'. **PocMon** a walking memory device equipped with an AI. **A** A mischievous child. **B** A quiet boy. **C** An agreeable girl.

From the back cover:

Humanity Has Declined - Business as Usual

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. This is a collection of short stories filled with unrecorded episodes including many new tales, such as what happened in Kusunoki Village after I had become the boss, the mysterious behind-the-scenes (part-time) works of the fairies, the travels to craft a text called The Human Habitation Guidebook and even A Day in the Dating Life of Watashi / love comedy style...? And many more. In the style of the free toy that comes with a meal. Right now it is Business As Usual in this world.

平常運転
Business as Usual



The Working Fairies and the Venture Business



One day, the fairies were playing Acorn Rugby in a field.

"Weee..." "Take this..." "Century..."

Though they were playing, they for some reason were depressed.

"...boring."

The acorn made a rebounding sound as one of the fairies let that out as he dropped it.

"So vain..." "We're so pitiful..." "Something feels missing..."

The fairies did not feel in a good mood unless they had some secret connection to their humans.

They always wanted to toy about with them.

"...em-, ployment?"

The fairies lifted their heads in relief.

"Work?" "Labor?" "Let's go job hunting!" "We need a CV!" "Entry, entry!" "Let's make a house call!" "Let's search!" "How long till a wonderfully exploitative company?"

The only good company for fairies that wanted to toy about humans was an exploitative Black Company, which rode its employees hard with unpaid overtime and the like.

From nowhere in particular the fairies took out a thick Personnel Wanted file and promptly began job hunting.

They then ignored all preferable terms such as *high salary guaranteed*, *five days work week*, *welfare included* and *no overtime*, and only checked the personnel requests that would reliably make them work in an unfavorable environment.

"What about here?" "It says they pay overtime!" "Ahhh, too bad..."

"Is light work easy?" "Light work is heavy work!" "So-so, I guess!"

"Only pays results!" "Job turnover is no less than 50 percent!" "Minimum 500 hours a week of labor!"

This was not healthy.

And as they were all searching like that, look what they found, nothing else but a marvelous (by fairy standard) employment opportunity.

"T-, this is...!"

There was a wide and loo~ong road that passed through Kusunoki Village.

It went through from the center and continued all the way to the outskirts.

Mr. N had finished working the fields and was leisurely walking down that path.

Mr. N then discovered something unusual on the side of the road.

"Well now, just what is this, then? Wasn't here yesterday."

It was a fairly large cardboard box.

It was taller than an adult, and its shape was that of a parallelepiped stood vertically.

There were open spaces like tiny windows on part of the front side, and they were closed with cellophane. And on the other side there were several products put on display.

Perhaps they were trying to make it look like a vending machine. Mr. N was puzzled.

Real vending machines could still be seen everywhere one went even with the world the way it was then. Those ancient things were still appearing around the lands as a part of the ruins.

It was just that, in the present age of no money currency, those machines had no real purpose.

Worse, being made of cardboard meant they were more like a child's papercraft work.

The man gazed at the products on display.

There were a faded photograph, acorns and leaves, pebbles, rusted nails, and more.

Particular among those was the shining and sparkly bottle cap with a pop-up advertising banner that read '*recommended!*'.

"...nothing I want."

Mr. N lost his interest and wandered away from the cardboard vending machine.

Current monthly sales goal: 500 chocolate coins! Currently acquired... 0

Sitting reclined on his chair under a really big chart, President Fairy spat this out.

"Unacceptable! Ahhh, when I was young I sure knew how it was done!"

The fairies in business suits looked at each other with perplexed faces.

"But President, the current items for sale might not be good enough!"

One stepped forwards and declared that with courage.

"Might not be good enough!"

The current line-up of products for sale was what decided future revenues.

"The level of customer satisfaction might be low!"

"Might be low!"

Customer satisfaction was the lifeline of a company.

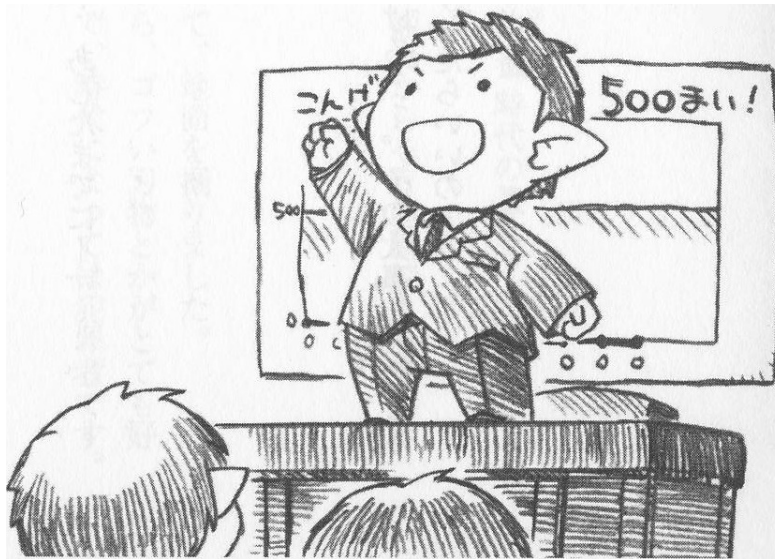
"The appeal might be insufficient!"

"Might be insufficient!"

The appeal of products was important.

"I decided!"

The president hopped on top of the desk.



"This is the President's order! Develop new products, all right? You have until tomorrow!"

"But all that said, Mr. President!"

"What is it now?"

"The subcontractors have died?"

The whole of the company filled with audible silence.

The subcontractors were brothers, the subcontractors were family.

They lived in this cruel world in decline by helping each other... and those precious, precious subcontractors might just have died of overwork. Just what exactly should they be doing now?

The words of the President broke the silence.

"...having that happen to them is their job?"

Who knows how many died, and still new products had been developed.

They were presented on the vending machine the next day.

"Na nah nah na~h♪, a ne~w everyday que-sera-sera~♪!"

What could only be barely called a little girl was walking the path alone, her cheeks flushed.

She was a golden-haired lady of young age with curly hair.

And then she spotted it. The cardboard vending machine, that was.

"W-, what on Earth is this...?"

The girl did not know this, but the products on display had all been changed.

The line-up had a postcard-sized picture of the master human (the present chief of the Kusunoki Office of Mediation), a large acorn, a special-selection leaf, choice pebbles, an unrusted nail, and more.

The little girl's eyes sparkled with light.

"My-my-my, what-do-we-have-here."

The little girl's attention was drawn to a single product in particular.

"Is this *that* thing, I wonder. A relic of that unstarving era that will put out an item if one inserts a coin..."

There was a slit for inserting something on the bottom of the products display.

Put something in there and something else comes out. The design let one figure that out from the focus of the ergonomics.

The little girl looked around carefully.

"Usually, if you dig around this spot..."

Spotting the place, she took the large knife she had at her hips and dug the ground.

As a digression, this young girl may have had the looks of a doll, but she really liked large bladed tools. Military knives in particular. She owned many of them, which, depending on the era, may have been a crime.

"There it is!"

A coin appeared from the ground.

Coins were buried everywhere in this world. They had no use, you see.

"Insert this, and..."

The coin was slotted in the slit.

When it was... the vending machine's roulette began revolving with a mechanical sound.

"Huh? And the choice of product...?"

Truth was you could not choose them. There were no buttons to each of the items on display.

Exactly... it was a random vending machine.

With a clunk of a sound the product fell out of the dispensing slot.

The little girl very carefully took the item.

Congratulations! You have obtained a Choice Pebble!

".....'ei!"

The little girl with curly hair took the quite rare pebble of superior quality and tossed far and away.

Current monthly sales goal: 500 chocolate coins! Currently acquired... 0

Reclining on his chair, President Fairy said this.

"They're no good. These new products, that is."

"But President, humans are fickle creatures?"

"...and that there's precisely why they're so good, don't you agree!"

"...that's true!"

Master humans who were not self-indulgent were not master humans! They were boring!

That was the mood around the office.

"Also, products get dispensed even when using a genuine coin!"

There was no point unless people used chocolate coins.

"No good, 's just no good, isn't it!"

The indignant President Fairy hopped on top of the desk.

"This is the President's order! Make even better products, please! And everything except chocolate must be prohibited!"

"But President..."

"What now?"

"There's no more subcontractors, you see?"

The whole of the company filled with audible silence.

The subcontractors truly made good products. The subcontractors were truly reliable friends.

They made a real ruckus back on at year's end party, see. However, they were with us no longer. How sad...

The words of the President broke the silence.

"...simply search for new ones, all right?"

A woman who was an UN employee was walking alone down the path.

"Even in this age,"

she seemed deep in thought, so she was muttering something as she walked, "there are people who make illustrations as a hobby... if they were able to upload them to a network... a system that allowed anyone to see the upped illustration... and you could even add comments, facilitating interaction... then introducing a ranking, which fans up the feeling that it is a big event of sorts... yes. Would that work? It would be hard to provide individual machines for that purpose, but then we would only need to set up the devices in something like a café..."

It appeared that she was thinking through about her hobbyist work.

Her idea was that of a revolutionary network service, which, had it been a better era, might have gathered over ten million users.

Sorry. Thinking about it was a little (by centuries, or depending on how things were, by millennia) belated.

"If I were able to implement this, we could also collect all the individual information we wanted, it would make it easy to mobilize people, too, we could spot new talents, and it would reflect well on me, meaning I could afford to never miss a meal for my whole life..."

As she looked up at the sky, thinking things like she was trying to catch a cloud, she spotted something unfamiliar at the side of the road.

"Oh, a vending machine? No, it's cardboard... yes, of course, the fairies."

She immediately figured out that this was the work of the fairies. She was in a job related to them, after all.

"Let's see, now, let's see, a product that I would be interested in..."

She appeared mindlessly cheerful, but she actually checked the products on display with the eye of an expert.

Canned vacuumed air, an elaborately produced paperweight in the shape of a venomous spider, a table lamp in the shape of an outdoors lamp, and a stamp maker.

It seemed they were somewhat far from the lady's preferences.

"Hummm. This sort of culturally promoted goods are their domain, I suppose. Maybe I should take one as a present?"

She picked up a coin that had fallen to the side of the street and put it in the slit. However.

"...huh, this won't accept anything but chocolate coins. Mh-hm."

She all too quickly gave up and went to walk down the path.

And thirty minutes later, she came back with a massive load of chocolate coins in her arms.

She had a better than average ability to procure things and mobilize people, if only in the fields she was interested in.

"I'll leave my regrets for after I've cleared this machine out. These are the Secret Arts of the Ways to an Adult's Collection."

And so she was fine with doing as she set out to.

Current monthly sales goal: 500 chocolate coins! Currently acquired... 230

President Fairy was in a good mood.

"Isn't this very good? Shan't we proceed like this?!"

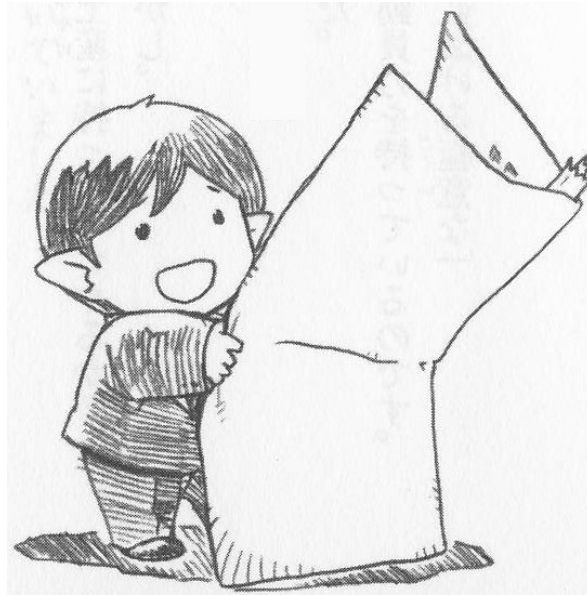
"By the way, President!"

"What is it now!"

"Customers have written us what they want!"

The employee fairy handed over the sheet with their requests that had been stuck to the vendomat.

This is what was written on it.



* Requests

The current products lack impact, they need to go more like ka-pow (be catchier!).

Is some tool usable to fly freely in the sky impossible to make?

Right now the Village is in an unprecedented boom of people moving in, but can't it be made more fun?

Medical examinations are annoying, I wish we could do them easily at home.

(Proposal!) If you could expand the chocolate coin standard you could produce new business schemes. Doing that would create an interactive earning structure involving not only your company, but chocolate coin manufacturers, brokers, and much more. It would be a powerful connection with the chocolate coin manufacturers!

If you're able to satisfy these orders, we can promise you two hundred chocolate coins for next month.

"...this is... from our customers, no... our clientele!"

A shudder made the rounds of the office.

The *clientele* were beings on par with gods.

Going against them was forbidden.

Please think of these client orders as problematic enough to make the company keel over. It was a question of whether they could do it for two hundred chococoins, that was all.

The company's goal was five hundred coins. However, the *clientele* only offered two hundred coins. It was not enough.

But it was a steady earning. It was also not enough.

Should they kick away their *clientele* and aim for the five hundred, or jump at the dangled two hundred?

It was a moment when the decision of the business people was demanded.

"President, what do we do?" "The demand is too much?" "Won't the new subcontractors die?"

"Earlier I went to see the subcontractors, and they were already in a big crunch!" "Good on 'em!"

"President, what do we do?"

President Fairy was hounded by his employee fairies for answers.

President Fairy gave his back to them and clasped his hands behind his back as he solemnly announced this.

"I will consult my favored book."

President Fairy tossed his favorite book on the desk.

It was a picture book, an Eastern style comic book (age of publishing unclear).

To translate the title literally, it went "Chief Island - Kousaku". Kousaku was the Easterner who, the story went, would interact with other people on the island kingdom of Chief Island to achieve personal success.

According to that comic, it was important to follow one's own beliefs when working.

"I-, in other words?"

"Following your own beliefs... this job... we'll accept it!"

"But still, President, there's the subcontractors who...!"

The whole of the company filled with audible silence.

Though there was no margin of error to the deadline, the new subcontractors had been hired for a cheap fare. That really helped the company. They had fun business meetings where laughter knew no end. They no longer went along with things merely as a job. Their relationship was one of friends. Meetings were such wonderful things, indeed!

The words of the President broke the silence.

"...I hope the next subcontractors will be nice people too?"

"...chocolate coins again."

The young chief of the Office of Mediation sighed that as she read a letter addressed to her. She was still quite the young new chief, having succeeded as she had to the previous generation chief. Lie or truth, she was said to be able to employ fairies as she pleased.

"Was there some job?"

A girl the same age and in the same job as the chief said that.

"It is not like there are jobs, however, these days I have incessant requests from the people of the Village to make sweets for charity, bazaars, and association meetings."

"That's just 'cause you're famous as a sweets maker. That's good, right?"

"But these are only chocolate coins."

"And ain't chococoins fine. Easy to eat, and you're happy when you receive one. You should make 'em and give 'em out as much as they ask."

"...it is unnatural for everyone to request the same thing, however."

"But you got a packing machine for making chococoins, don'tcha. Using that you're done in an instant, right?"

"I am not speaking as to whether this is simple or complicated... I am saying that it is unnatural for everyone, just everyone to request the same thing at the same time."

"If you go along being suspicious of all these things, then you might as well hunt for a culprit whenever a button comes off, won't you."

The office chief shut into a silence that was trying to hide away the problem.

The chococoin packing machine was a convenient bit of machinery that automatically crafted chocolate coins by simply putting in the ingredients.

"...this is just, it is suspicious, is it not."

"Whatcha think you're doing with all these suspicions! You're the new chief of this office, right? You need to get along with the people of the Village, don't you! Suspicious or non-suspicious, none of that matters. Observe now the blue sky! For doing so will make these tedious doubts irrelevant, see."

The chief of the Office of Mediation passed her gaze over the magnificent scene that she could see from the third floor's window.

On that blue sky there crossed an older man with a flying rotor hung on his back, like a cat grasped at the nape of his neck.

"....."

"....."

Looking closer, it was not only the older man who was flying. There was a crowd of other residents with rotor flight devices.

"Oh no! I'm gonna be late for my date!," went a youngster.

"Today's field work was back-breaking, I'll go home and have a drink....," went a work-loving man.

"Eeek, it's past closing time~, I gotta hurry!," went a lady.

But not all of the people were hurried.

The chief quickly turned her head to the side and saw a trio of hovering middle-aged men and women holding a talk besides the well.

"Lady, say, say, did you hear? There's a rumor about that new family that moved into the Third District!"

"I haven't heard it, what's going on?"

"Well, see, listen here! They say the lady of that house has been divorced!"

"Myyy, so she was! So that child is hers, not her husband's?"

A Tool that let people fly free in the sky was popular in the Village of late.

"...whatever one may say or think, those are Fairy Tools."

"That's not necessarily true, innit? I don't think it's a good thing to rush into conclusions, nope. You're the chief of this place here now, and I think that accepting what the people of the Village are doing with level-headedness is also important. It's that tolerance that will make this Village..."

A rucksack that allows flying in the sky when worn on the back, a lantern that shrank anything its light shone on into pocket size, and a badge that performed medical diagnosis when stuck on the skin:

It came that a large number of these three types of Tools were confiscated from all over the Village.

"It was you who did these, right?"

"...yup."

This month's sales report 2000 chococoins gathered!

President Fairy used to wear a plain-colored business suit, but now he was wearing a suit that shone gold. It was sparkling.

"Our company is going super well, right?"

"It's as you say, President!"

Even the employee fairies were wearing beautiful clothes.

And it was not just the employees, even the interior of the company shone gold.

"We make and make, but everything sells like hot cakes?"

The company's treasure box was buried in more chocolate coins than they could eat.

Never before in their fairy lives had they come into a volume this massive of sweets.

This was no longer just a game!

"President, your car just arrived?"

"Ohhh, it's here!"

President Fairy left the building and found a super-luxurious car parked there.

It was the new car that he had sought to buy with the all too many chococoins he had. Well, it was just a radio controlled car, however.

"President, this is the new car that you wanted to buy!"

Dealer Fairy approached him with flattery in his words.

"Indeed! Well done!"

"The price is two hundred?"

"Pay it!"

"Yes, President, with cash!"

Secretary Fairy handed a bag with 200 chococoins to Dealer Fairy.

"Then I guess I'll have my first drive!"

The radio controlled luxury car started up with good force, then it happened:

"This is the Kusunoki Tax Office. We're investigating tax evasion. You're all under arrest."

Hop, and the master human with a white labcoat that had suddenly appeared picked up the radio controlled car. She was the chief of the Office of Mediation.

"Eeeeeeeek!"

"This is impounded on suspicion of tax evasion!"

"Noooooooo!"

"I'm going to fold up the building, too!"

The black-suited lady who had come with the chief nimbly dismantled the piece of cardboard that had been used in the stead of office. Those motions... she was a pro!



"Daddy daddy daddyyy!"

The fairies ran pell-mell, headed for the forest depths.

"There was no need to go this far..."

The Mediator, who had a close connection to the fairy company, said that apologetically.

"Well, now it will not be going at high speeds towards becoming a serious issue, so..."

"We intervened at the best time, we did. What else from you, chief," went the black suited lady.

"Awww, my wishes..."

"Take your responsibility and write that you wrote the whole of the request sheet yourself, please. And without making a scene!"

"Wheeey..."

"This had become a significant avenue for boredom evasion for the fairies too, understand?"

And so it was that peace returned to the Village.

Well, it had been peaceful to begin with.

And thus was how Kusunoki Village was like in these days.

はたらく妖精さんたちの、
食品玩具
The Working Fairies and the
Toy Freebie



"Labor!"

The fairies could at any moment suddenly awaken to an appetite for work.

"What's it now? You just shouted something out of nowhere?" "Did you go off in the head?"

"Wanna go to a mind clinic?" "For the mind, you gotta have counseling!"

His friends, who had been enjoying acorn billiards, tossed him comparatively nasty words.

"I have a feeling to the MAX that I wanna work!"

"Work?" "Splendid!" "Wanna do it?" "At a crab-canning boat?" "Shall we ride one?" "Canned crab!" "Canned crab!" "Let's canned crab!"

These fairies were all too eager for work.

They found job in an instant and began working.

The fairies exploded with love for labor, they had the will to do all they could for their beloved master humans.

Let's rewind time to a little while earlier.

"There was something super good at the caravan, so I used some of my precious rationing tickets and got it. Here, today it's special so you get some too."

It was the ABC trio of kids.

There'd been a bustle among them previously.

To put it in serialized story terms, it was an event that was recorded around the seventh volume.

They had gotten a little taller since then.

Perhaps due to their lives alone, away from their parents, the Trio changed just a little bit, but right now they were still on the way to mastering the toughness of wild animals.

Right now everyone had forgotten it, but they worked veeery well with that yet-unabolished societal system as they lived their slow, peaceful daily life.

Ban-banzai for the welfare system.

"Something interesting, but what is it?" said girl C, the lone flower of the group.

"Just look, see what's inside!"

The guys yanked open their boxes with their fingers.

"Mh, isn't this caramel?"

Boy B lifted up to his eye level one of the things wrapped in thin paper.

"It is. It's super good. But there ain't just caramel inside."

Inside the paper box about the size of a cigarette case there were eight pieces of caramel.

"It's so sweet!"

"These are perfect to recover sugar levels while studying."

"This cocoa flavor is ju~st perfect for caramel."

"You idiot, the best would be melon flavor, isn't it obvious!"

"I'm for the yogurt flavor, I had it only once before, but..."

The trio spoke about while biting into the caramels. Whatever else, they really loved sweets.

And then, the caramel was not the only thing inside the box.

"This caramel, you see, is two boxes docked together, and the box on top... look, there's a freebie."

Teensy nunchucks dropped in A's palm as he shook the paper box upside-down.

"Now what's this?"

"Oh, it's the Weapon Series. You got one."

"Is this a weapon?"

"They're an Eastern weapon called 'nunchucks'. Just a miniature, though. There's one of eight

possible types in each of 'em."

"I see. They're for collecting," said B, seemingly impressed. "Mine has something of a plate with holes in it."

"They're knuckle dusters! You got one!"

"Mine has an eraser in the shape of a cake! This is so nice!"



"That's 'cause yours is for girls. Nice, innit~."

The trio had their fill of caramel.

"So, I thought about this a little, but, how about we make some of this too?"

It was A who proposed that.

"We make it, then what?"

"Right. Any point to it?"

"We put these out on the Sunday Free Market and we'll make a killing in rationing tickets. You said before that you like rare books, right? And you too, you said you want cooking tools, right?"

The two sunk into thought.

Though they could make a living, they always felt that they lacked the tickets with which to obtain hobbyist stuff like that.

"Do you have a plan? You're not thinking of making these by hand, are you?," went B.

"I do have some ideas about that. But there's several things we gotta procure, and doing that alone's hard. C'mon, let's do it! It's not like we're doing something bad."

The following notice had been posted on the Village's bulletin board:

"Any toys you no longer need? Donate them to poor children. It's fine even if they're broken (we'll fix them). We will only collect toys that fit in the palm of a hand. Please put them in the collection basket set at the address below. We will only accept them until next Saturday!"

The trio was inspecting the collected tiny toys at A's house.

"We got more than a few here."

"But they're all garbage. They all need repairing, don't they."

"How 'bout we fix them?"

"I'll pass. Just pack in the ones that are usable. The ones with spring mechanisms that can't be fixed we can call as being merely figures and donate them to the poorhouse for real."

"...so we will also do what we pretended we would."

"How wicked of us!"

"That's what commerce is about, I'd say! I mean, we're children here. A little unfairness for the sake of a real and tough life can be overlooked, can't it."

That opinion of his seemed to have no objection, so the two went back to wordlessly picking out the tiny toys.

However, there were far less usable toys than they thought.

A large plushie (which for some reason smelled sour), the empty shells of insects, packs of cards with some missing, it was all things like those.

"Well now, looks like the near totality are for the trash can," went C.

"We got too few, don't we? You wanted to make 200 in total, right?"

Ye~~ah..."

"Besides, there's some here that aren't toys. This rabbit made of glass is only decorative, I'd say."

"Ah, those are OK. Put it in the paper box I prepared."

A took out an already prepared paper box.

There was an illustration printed on the thick cardboard, and, to be finished, the paper box only required being closed as per the guidelines.

"This is well done, isn't it."

C tried to make one by herself as a test, and smiled brightly.

"The Monument had stencil data of all kinds, you see."

"...you used that? Good job accessing it, then."

"I was helped by a talking calculator back at sensei's, so it was an easy one."

"The machine with that nasty personality, right. How did you get her to work for you?"

"I just plain asked without any concern for politeness and she helped me right away."

"I see now. So, you got that data back and printed it with I guess the school's printing machine."

"If you make a friend out of that thing you can do anything!"

"Mebbe so. Hard pass on living a life where anything can be done to me, though."

"But we'd have problems if you didn't make the caramel."

C sunk into silence.

"That's right, is the caramel done?"

"...I'm getting taught how right now."

"R-, right now?!"

"Who by?," went B

"...by sensei."

Initially, even C wanted her teacher, to whom she was so grateful, to make all the tasty sweets. However.

"Sensei, I really want to have some caramel! The caramel you make is just the best! It's the most royal! That's why it'll be a piece of cake... for you to make about 1200 of them!"

That teacher she was so grateful to initially listened to her with a cheer, but partway through she came to stare at the little girl's face with a terrifyingly blank expression. Just like she had seen through her interlocutor's lies...



Remembering that, C shook in terror.

"You should've been a little craftier than that... if she was on to us she'd stop us, maybe."

"That's right. Sensei like things all *calmly calm*, all *slowly slow*, all *non-fussily non-fussed*, so if we were past the line we would get stopped, I think."

"It doesn't matter how skilled you are, asking one person to make 1200 would be to ask the impossible, seriously!"

C's rebuttal was most pertinent.

The plan was for one box to have six pieces of caramel. It was too much all the way from the planning phase.

"If you start learning how now, will you make it for Sunday? It's the day after tomorrow, you know?"

"...honestly, we don't have enough ingredients, so it might be impossible. And we also need to wrap them in the proper wrapping paper."

"Then how many does it look like you can make?"

A asked that, and C answered after thinking through for a few moments.

"About 200, I suppose?"

"200 pieces? We can only put a single one per box, then," went B.

"Then it's not a caramel with a free toy, it's a toy with a free piece of caramel!"

The trio crossed their arms and sunk into a hummed silence.

"...say, if worst comes to worst, could we also sell lemonade at the stall? That'd be easier, yes. That way there'd be no need for this hustle..."

Making and selling lemonade at a stall was the most popular way for children to earn rationing tickets at the free market. Lemonade was easy to make, and it didn't need to be wrapped drop by drop, either.

"We're not going to make even one drop of lemonade. Everybody's doing it so we won't stand out, it just ain't gonna sell."

"Ngh... no good, I suppose..."

"We don't have enough extras and we don't have enough caramel either. It's no good, this plan we got here."

B pointed out the cruel reality.

"Well, we still don't know, so don'tcha give it up!"

Right then, there was the sound of knocking at the door.

"Hellooo... oh, wait, there's no one there? Mh, what is this?"

A opened the door and saw no one trying to come in, there was just a yellow basket laid at her feet.

"Did they forget it? Was someone delivering it? Well, whatever."

"Who was it?"

"Don't really get it, but we got one more basketful of toys. Awesome!"

A didn't have much in the way of questions as she flipped over that mysterious basket. Seeing what hit the floor, the trio opened their eyes wide in surprise.

And then Sunday came. The free market was being held in the square.

Unneeded items were given, exchanged, and bartered for rationing tickets, it was a pragmatic and unsophisticated event. There were also many that came from outside the Village.

In a corner of the square, the trio distributed their new product.

"Big Ben Caramel, it's a brand new product!"

"It feels like the real thing!"

"We exchange it for rationing tickets!"

As the largish paper box had the printed illustration of the trademark clock tower, it was rather well done as a product. It had appeal.

Being that of course no one was selling anything like it, it stood out.

Especially in this area, since everyone else had made lemonade stalls.

"Well? Not making lemonade was the right thing to do, right?"

"So it seems... we were almost humiliated, we were..."

The lemonade stalls were almost exact copies of each other and the people who held them were embarrassed about it.

The Village had few children, however it wasn't like there weren't any, and there were many families with kids among the customers from outside.

The trio's business plan was to target specifically those children.

"Ah, caramel. One, please!"

The first customer unsealed the package right there.

Realizing there was only a single piece of caramel inside he made a *what?* of a face, but only for an instant, as he next scrutinized the bonus item that had tumbled out.

"Awesome, it's a troll!"

A troll was a type of fairy that appeared in northern legends. They had many shapes, but this freebie was in the shape of the more popular image, that of a low-intelligence giant.

While it had the humorous looks of a hippo standing upright, his blood-covered club showed his fighting prowess. From the edges of his lips hung a triangular hat, which made it look like he had eaten someone just then and there.

Its size fit in a palm, but it had the punch of something alive.

It wiped away the issue of the caramel.

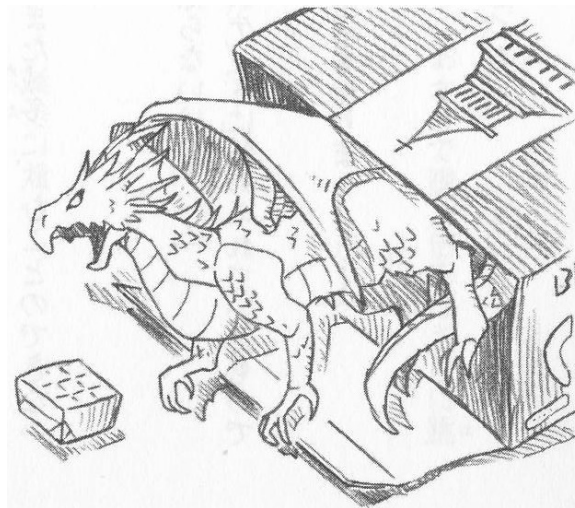
"This is extremely realistic! You're kidding me, right? I've never seen anything like it!"

That rumbling yell was the trigger for children throughout the square to gather where the trio was.

"This one has a goblin!"

"A devilish knight come out!"

"Awesome! I drew a dragon!"



The freebies were so well done that the fact that there was a single piece of caramel didn't become a problem at all.

The trio rejoiced with a dance.

"The extras are all genuine monster figurines!"

"We have a total of twenty-seven types!"

"Please trade your duplicates!"

The children rushed in.

The Big Ben Caramel was selling well.

"Sold out!"

"We sold out in 30 minutes..."

"Look at this mountain of tickets. We're rich, we're rich!"

The trio was so happy they made a ring and danced.

That evening, the trio celebrated.

They stuffed their cheeks with high quality food that they normally would never eat, and washed it down with once again rarely obtainable cola.

"Never thought it'd taste so good!," went A.

"It's all thanks to that last basket. Though I dunno who put it there..."

Those figures that, today, seized so well the hearts of children were inside the aforementioned basket.

"Who cares, it's all details! We still have figures left, so we can do this next week, too!"

C belched as she stood up.

The AB duo had no problems either, of course.

Whatever else, it seemed that they still had many more of those figures left.

"This is the Deluxe Big Ben Caramel!"

"Renewal edition!"

"Each of them now has three pieces!"

Rumors about Big Ben Caramel were exploding among the younger children of the neighborhood.

A long queue had formed at the trio's stall moments after the free market opened.

"Please don't push! Please don't push!"

"We packed lots of caramel!"

"This time we're not accepting only rationing tickets, but high-quality food ingredients, rare books, clothes, cooking implements and more!"

It was a roaring success.

It wasn't only children who wanted to buy, one could spot adults in the queue as well.

Freebie toys of this quality also drew the hearts and minds of adults. Thanks to that, the sales multiplier increased even further.

"Say, isn't this getting a little too big for us?"

C, who had of course gotten worried, whispered that to A's ear.

"It's all right. We got it goin' good. There's no way we're letting a chance like this slip out of our hands!"

"The problem isn't just that..."

"Hey you two, the free market's sponsor has come."

"What?"

An free-spirited elderly lady stood behind B's back.

"Hiii, I'm the free market's sponsor. Can I have a bit of your time, I wonder?"

The trio looked at each other.

From among them, A was bounced off like a launched marble.

"Woah-wah! Hello... what is it?"

"Are you the one in charge?"

"I am, so... what is it?"

The lady hummed in perplexity. She seemed hesitant as to whether to say this or not.

"...it might be harsh for me to say something like this to a child like you, but I gotta say it, you

see. And you know what, what you are distributing was described as caramel in the application form you compiled beforehand, right?"

"It is. It's Big Ben Caramel. Renewal Edition and all."

"Truth is, see, that through the questionnaire we hand to the people coming here, we have begun to have a number of complaints about your caramel."

"What, complaints?"

"Complaints that while there's a toy as extra, there's no actual caramel."

"Lies. We do have it, you see? This time we got two pieces each. No problems here."

"But the complaints that there's no caramel are in good number. Enough that as the sponsor I can't ignore them. Although you said it was a food item on the application form, what you are distributing is something else... and that's not a good thing."

"Why's that?"

"If other distributors were to begin doing the same, it would be an issue. I would be in trouble if someone handing out second-hand clothes were to, for example, suddenly start serving cake. It would be a precedent for rule-breaking... do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

A was silent.

"I'll investigate."

B, who had been nervously listening to the conversation, unsealed one of the caramel boxes.

"...nothing. There's nothing. There's only the freebie."

The detailed figure of a golem was firmly inside, but there was no trace of the two pieces of caramel that there should have been.

"None here, either! It's like the caramel alone has vanished from the near totality of the boxes!," said C.

"Which means that you three forgot to put the caramel in, I wonder? Assuming that, I'm sorry but I have to make you stop distribution for the time being."

"Whaaat!"

The trio rose in protest as a single voice.

"I'm not saying you'll be suspended forever. First of all we have a queue, so I will suspend you for just one hour, so you can put the caramel back in in that time, what do you say?"

"We'll... do that..."

"We will."

"But I was so~ sure we put the caramel in."

A sign that said *distribution suspended (reopening time pending)* was stuck on the stall, and the trio came right behind it as if trying to escape the booing of the gathered customers, deciding to put caramel inside the packs once more.

Happily, they had prepared a reserve of caramel pieces.

"This is definitely odd. We put them inside for sure, and they vanished without leaving a single bit behind."

"Did either of you skip out on your jobs? I'm sure I've put mine in."

"I'm not skipping out on anything. You, instead, didn't you daze off and forget to put them in?"

"This isn't the time to quarrel. We just gotta put them back in."

"Damn all this~! Just as it was finally going well~!"

They opened the packages so as to not break them, tossed in the caramel, and sealed them back again. The work itself was simple, so they managed to process things with a certain speed once they got used to it.

"At this rate we'll be done within an hour!"

As A had guessed, the reinsertion of caramel finished and they could restart distribution

without incident.

"Huh? There's no caramel here." "Nothing here either." "Didn't we protest this earlier, too?"

The customers spoke out among those lines.

"What the?! We put it in, you know?!"

"Enough, please~, distribution is suspended~."

The sponsor had come.

"I'm telling you we put it in! We totally put it in!"

"T-, this is strange... I have a feeling that something odd is going on."

"What's all this, are you serious? We're cursed, aren't we?!"

With things like this, the trio, who had little experience with life, could only do one thing.

At times like these there was only one person they could rely upon—

"I see, so the caramel that you were sure you had put inside the box vanished like magic.

What you would call a locked room murder... no, this situation ought better be called a locked room food-pinching. Hummm, this is a difficult one. It is truly mysterious, to put it clearly it is likely this will remain unsolved."

The Mediator, the trio's beloved teacher as well as an odd-jobber of good repute around the Village, was about to leave right after she had been at last introduced into the story.

"Sensei, please wait!"

"Please investigate seriously..."

"You're way too unenthusiastic about this! Help us!"

With the trio hounding her, the Mediator groaned low.

"...when there's a program of events like this, it ends up causing all sorts of trouble all the way from morning... I am kind of tired."

"If you're going to just look, then look! Here, this is the Deluxe Big Ben Caramel that we've made!"

"Another pointlessly ornate package..."

The trio explained honestly everything that had happened until then.

"Ahhh, you put out a notice... when you did, a basket full of ornate figures was delivered, sender unknown... huh, huh, I see... that... that was definitely..."

The Mediator announced this with a hoarse voice.

"That was a kind person with incredible skills."

"Sensei, aren't you just trying to avert your eyes from this with full force?"

B sharply saw through her.

"That is not true at all. I truly do not know. Caramel spontaneously vanishing when put alongside a doll... impossible."

The Mediator laid down on a bench, put her hands together and used them as a pillow, then closed her eyes.

"Your sensei is going to lay down for a bit. I am sleepy."

"Please don't sleep, sensei!"

Shaken violently, she woke up.

"...nggggh, I understand. Then I believe I am going to solve this. Come with me."

The Mediator headed to the Office of Mediation along with the trio.

"This is a super-small hidden camera. Set this up in a box and you can view what is happening within."

What the Mediator took out of the storehouse was a precision instrument smaller than even a

button.

"People in the past used these to engage in a variety of criminal conducts."

"..." "..." "..."

Humans who faced an inconvenient truth straight and forwards were indomitable... or so the Mediator actually meant as she told them that.

"So we just put this... there. We will pick up the transmitted image with PocMon, there."

On the talking calculator, or rather PocMon-san, there appeared an image of the inside of the caramel package.

The trio stared hard at that image.

"Then we will put the figure and the caramel inside. Close down the lid, done."

"It's dark, sensei."

"I will increase the brightness."

"Ah, I can see, I can see."

"With this you can see everything that happens inside the box."

"Amazing... so this is the power of science. All we need is to keep up our surveillance!"

B had said that like he had found a rare form of entertainment.

"All right! Tonight we'll pull an all-nighter and continue our surveillance!"

"Ah, the caramel is already gone, you see."

"Too fast! It moved too fast!"

The screen displayed caramel that had already been consumed.

"...you know, sensei, we just don't get what happened."

"It has been recorded, so try replaying it frame by frame. F'wahhh..."

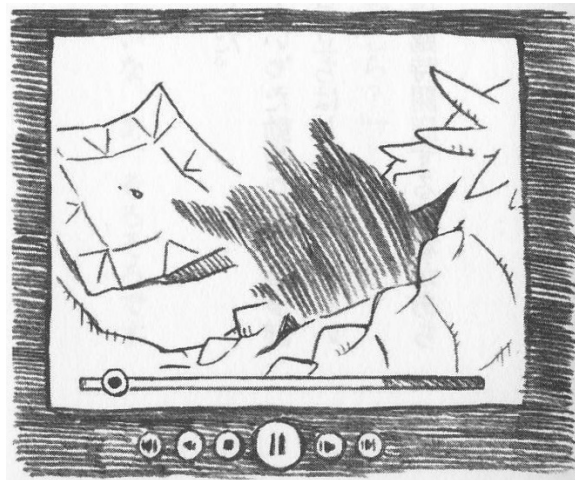
They played the video a frame at a time.

One frame made the trio open their eyes wide.

Until then, there had been no change whatsoever inside the box, but suddenly something strange occurred.

The camera had captured it:

the instant when someone had taken off their figure costume and instantly consumed the caramel, then returned back once again to their original place.



The trio couldn't even speak for a while.

"Are you serious with this..."

"T-, there's someone inside them! There's someone inside the figures!"

"Se-, sensei! What kind of phenomenon is this?"

"Bwaaah so mysterious is it not your sensei is astonished."

The movements of the person inside the figure were too quick, even with the camera they couldn't be seen except as a blur. And the next frame the figure was back to how it was, like nothing had happened.

There was someone inside the figure and they had pinched away the caramel.

That was the full story of the case.

"Bwah! That's impressive!"

"One of the century's greatest finds!"

"Sensei, what should we do?!"

Unlike the trio, who was excited, the Mediator was relaxing.

After taking a big stretch, she said this with no spirit to her.

"Hu~mmm, there are so~ many things that are inexplicable in this world. Ah, should I make some tea? What snacks should I serve with it, I wonder. I am sure that I had leftover konpeitos around here..."

The trio stared at their beloved teacher with eyes that felt like they could be shedding tears of blood.

As expectable, she couldn't exactly let the thing go as it was.

"...sensei, do you think this will solve the case?"

A crowd of men was killing time in a square dyed the red of sunset.

The people had come from all over, there were animals like sheep and weasels that somebody was probably guarding, paper-like people, mech-like people, locals of all sorts, you see, and, well, they were mixed among people who instead didn't stand out much.

The near totality of stalls had closed up for the day, so it was nearly the time for drinking spots to open up here and there, as they would open temporarily and only at this kind of events.

All the bars had the first drink free. They also had snacks to be had with the drinks.

People came in to find that one drink and then just waited there.

Within that crowd was the ABC trio holding party poppers in their hands.

They had carelessly distributed dolls of unknown origins that contained someone inside. They might get the death penalty. Because they were afraid of that, the Mediator handed them these things.

"That is correct. We might say we will be able to solve this, we might say we will leave the ending unfulfilled... well, let us solve this."

The Mediator uttered something contradictory.

"In events like these, anything is fine as long as it can fit a sphere."

"But will we be able to get a happy ending with these party poppers?"

The Mediator told this to B and C, who were uneasy.

"It will not be a happy ending, it will be a bitter ending. One that tastes youthful. Well, there are people who like their coffee black."

"...well, I prefer lemonade to coffee."

"This is not a first love affair, please do not expect a conclusion so bittersweet. Ah, it is about time. As many people have gathered as we can expect to gather, so how about we do it?"

The four faced an evening sky about to dye the color of night and pulled the poppers' strings. The free market was ending just then, and sponsors and exhibitors both also began making their poppers heard.

The Mediator and the trio's poppers were of special make.

In this fairy tale-like scene of sunset, sugary sweets were scattered about.

There was a species who was vulnerable to this sort of events among the crowd.

"P!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Every figure that was in the Village began moving all as one.

"What the-, my freebie just began moving!" "It's alive, the doll is alive!" "Bwah! My Dark Knight is fighting!"

A fierce struggle for the sugary sweets unfolded among the dwellers of the World of Illusion.

Twank, twank, resin-made weapons traded blows, and the winner would obtain one of the sugary sweets.

The square was for a time in an uproar.

Leaping over tents, swerving about people's feet, the bizarre tiny creatures ran rampant and took over the whole place. It was a mysterious event that allowed one to let out a smile.

"Ahhh, look! The figures are coming back!" "So they're going back to the world of illusions?"

"Amazing, this is a scene straight out of a fantasy...!"

It was sunset, so it was magical.

Gazed at calmly, however, it was like the figures alone had vanished.

But a crowd was vulnerable to mood, and they remained deceived.

Eventually a crowd of an applause filled the surroundings.

"...why?," went A.

"Because they kindly thought of this like it was an event. The people who had the dolls might start thinking, like, *whaaa?*, later on, however. Well, it is fine, is it not. It feels real, that was the ad slogan that your product used, correct? If you get complaints you can just say that."

"It's done, yes, then this is a happy end, right."

"I guess so. But since we can't sell these things anymore, I'm not sure we could call this 'happy', 's all..."

"Nope, I'm all right with this! We earned more than enough!"

Three voices, three opinions left their impressions behind as a Sunday night approached.

"How was it? The last part-time?"

Within the woods, the fairies were having glasses of stolen lemonade.

"It was easy!" "We were with sweets!" "It made for a retirement fund!" "It was low on impact!"

"We gotta search for our next job!" "Wish there was one that was more slave-ish!"

Thanks to the working fairies, the world was able to spend yet another day having fun.

A Message from the Past

One day, mysterious lithographs were discovered in the Village.

The discoverer was a farmer.

He unearthed a tiny stone casket from his field as he worked the land. As the casket was made of something like resin and had a lid on it, its contents were exceptionally well preserved.

Inside the casket there were six small lithographs, idols the size of a thumb, rings, necklaces, and other ornaments.

The discoverer had no knowledge of history or the like, so he did not know from when those items came, and could not read the lithographs either.

He just guessed that these were certainly fairly ancient items.

And because of that, he brought the lithographs to the Office of Mediation.

It was a marvelous event, similar to a drop of refreshing tonic in a boring daily life.

"If Grandfather were here he would be jumping with joy, I am sure."

I whispered that with nonchalance and, next to me, my worst friend and colleague Y suddenly pinched the inner corner of her eyes.

She loved events, and having heard the rumor that mysterious lithographs had been brought in, she had been standing in watch since early morning.

She grabbed yours truly's shoulders with a sultry grasp.

"How 'bout... we drink tonight!"

"No, we are not going to drink."

Y did not yet know that while Grandfather, the former chief of the Office, was only assumed dead, he could not necessarily be said to be deceased.

Yes, I did explain.

But I was not believed.

"I'm a realist, so as long as I don't see them with my eyes, I won't believe in ghosts and the like. But I understand well how sad it is for the chief to be gone. For now, tonight we drink. Fairies? Fairies actually exist, so they're not unscientific."

That was how she ranted.

Hers was the fallacy of a self-defined realist. I had given up trying to convince her.

Now then, back on the topic of the lithographs.

The fun of hitting resource materials face-to-face, scraping up the truth little by little, resembled in flavor the solving of a crossword puzzle.

If I had the time I felt that I could have immersed myself, but I am sad to say that I had a mountain of other work.

"That is why I believe I will borrow the power of the fairies and solve this rapidly."

I snapped my fingers and Assistant-san appeared from the documents room.

Assistant-san was, at present, sharing duties of assistance and head of vault management.

He had come up in the world a little, you see.

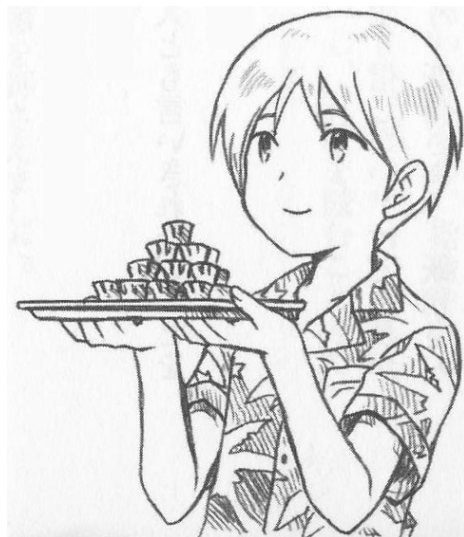
The job of head of vault management mainly entailed handling the items recovered during the work of Mediation. It fit him, as he had a habit of collecting, and he worked very hard at it every day.

Leaving unsupervised the Tools that the fairies made out of the spur of whatever moment would be a source of trouble, so their collection / management was quite the important job.

In short, the vault was... in a certain sense, a den of iniquity.

"Here you go, nee-san."

Assistant-san politely offered the tray he had in hand.



Good at guessing, he had already prepared what I wished for.

"Jelly in a cup? They're really small."

On the tray there was a small pile of one-sip jellies in a cup.

"The red ones are strawberry flavor, the blue are grape, the yellow pineapple. Please, have what you like."

"You say what I like, but..."

Y only poked the mountain of jellies.

"There's no need to worry. Though they're small, they were made with a secret tool made by the fairies. They were flavorless, so I only needed to add the flavoring and they were done."

"That's precisely why I'm worried, though, what do they do, in short?"

"When eaten, your interlocutor's true intents will be naked to you."

"That's nasty."

That was in fact nasty.

Still, you could read into people's minds even when they were badmouthing you only in their heads. Godlike.

Were they to spread to the world they might cause the outbreak of world wars, in a certain sense they was the deadliest of weapons, however their dosage and administration were subject to control so it was fine, all fine.

"So if you eat these you can tell what others are thinking... well then."

Y gulped down the jelly in an instant.

A gaze shining with malice was pointed at me. I was too naive, indeed. Though my defenses against this dark magic were perfect.

Of course, I also gulped down a piece of jelly.

"I c-, can't read anything?"

"Heh heh heh, by having both eaten the jelly, you voided your partner's translation abilities."

"...that's cheating," Y clucked with her tongue.

"My true thoughts are secret."

Two mighty rivals stood against each other.

And then, with that idiotic exchange aside...

"In short, it's not necessary for the one we're talking to to be human."

"...ah, is that true?"

After eating the jelly we could decipher unknown languages for a short time.

Maybe, as a mechanism, it used the jelly shape for oral intake of something like microbes.

They became brain parasites, modifying the capabilities for language. In the several dozen minutes it would take for them to die off we became masters of all languages.

"I can't read this. Ah, still, it feels like I'm understanding this a little. That's impressive."

"It is an old language, so it requires a bit of concentration."

"I'm good at concentrating."

The two of us stared down the lithographs as if eating into them. Y then lifted her eyes from the lithographs.

"...unnng, it's tiring. Tell me what they're about."

Why her, she lied as easily as she breathed.

I focused my attention on the lithographs, even her share of them, and suddenly understood what was written on them.

"I got it!"

"So what's written on it? Maybe about some ancient hidden treasure?!"

I read out the writing engraved on one of the lithographs as it was.

"...I'm just no match for the youngsters of late. Really, it's to cry about. But when I was young (rest snip)."

Y made a face like she had bit into a bitterbug.

Youngsters did not like whining about youngsters.

"And the others?"

I read out the second lithograph.

"The youngsters of this age are slackers! When our generation was young, we relied with the respect for superiors on the wisdom of the elderly. Doing so was the beating heart of our world, and (rest snip)."

"Why's it the exact same stuff!"

"I do not understand... it appears that those who recorded each lithograph were different people, and it just happened that they copied off each other, how about that?"

"Go to the next, just go."

"I hate this current trend of cross-generational treatises. I don't think there's any differences between generations, and going off on discussions about them is just a waste of time."

"Nice! Keep it up!"

"...or so it should be, but what if at present the younger generations as a whole were sharing some abnormality? They're ruthless and apathetic, just like insects. They can't be really be said to be like other humans. It's to despair about! Just what exactly is going on with these youngsters? It doesn't look like they're going to take social responsibilities. Which means that, at this point, the current generation alone has a natural defect, which can't..."

"Just, what the..."

I understood very well her feelings in her interjection.

I also felt sick of this.

"They all look like they are similar. Maybe this an ancient collection of documents that all have the same subjects. About the youngsters of the day, or something."

"Sure, something like the whining of older guys got intentionally engraved on lithographs and left behind..."

For how great the expectations were, the disappointment was also not little.
...I was grateful not to have taken the time to investigate them of my own strength.
In the end, the lithographs were filed away as *age unknown / investigation on hold* and tossed into the warehouse. A postponement with the prayer that somebody in the far future could figure out the truth.

An eternity passed and the existence of the lithographs was forgotten (two days later).
We were at present participating to a meeting of women from the Village.
What, were you wondering whether we had things like those?
Of course we did. Generally speaking, whenever three women were together, a meeting of women started. There was quite the old history to that.
Just like the Bourbon Dynasty had their Palace of Versailles, in the current era Kusunoki there also existed a youth association called the Ministry of Women Association.
If there were those, then of course there existed drinking parties.
What, you are telling me to actually research the period?
I had never heard of it, however it was not a particularly delectable thing.
The Ministry of Women's Association automatically enrolled Village women as soon as they reached the appropriate age.
I only barely noticed that I had found myself among them. One day a letter simply arrived, informing me that I was one of the members.
The women's age range was fifteen to thirty years old.
There were many things I wished to say, but I believe I will leave the retorts to the people who find themselves reading these records.
What, you say mine is not the type of character that would participate to a meeting of women in the first place?
I know that.
But I had to participate.
If I did not participate to these I might get told anything behind my back, I could feel odd sensations behind my back, I could have people act behind my back, all big problems.
...all... big problems.
Three of us came to participate.
I, Y, and UN covert operative K-san.
We gathered at a nearby place.
"This is my first time at a women's association~."
K-san said that.
"Do you not have drinking parties or the like in your workplace? With those darkly suited people, for example..."
"Covert operations is a job where it's forbidden to reveal one's true name, and since we're told not to pry into each other's private information, the intra-office drinking parties we hold regularly have the solemn feeling of a wake."
"That is harsh, indeed."
Now why would they be holding drinking parties regularly?
"This is the first time I'm involved in a private drinking party, so today I'd like to forget work and have fun."
"Apologies for inviting you, but whether one finds this fun depends on the person, you know?"
"What is that supposed to mean? What person wouldn't find this fun?"
"...right, you see, people who do not like talks that drag on endlessly without coming up with

any conclusion, for example."

"Talks that don't come to conclusions, like what?"

K-san did not seem to be able to think of anything on that subject.

By the way, our other comrade had this response.

"Awww, whattapain in the rear. I'm coming 'cause I know they got food and alcohol, but it's still annoying."

A response exceptionally like her.

The girl's best feature was her ability to superficially get along with those around her.

"This land is rustic, so it is all fine, you see. Depending on the land, things could get excessively unsociable or pressuring. For example, the hierarchical relationships could get bizarrely strict, or there could exist a large number of invisible rules which, violated, would bring you to a swift end."

"It's certainly true that the more people gather, the more lively the place becomes. The age is what it is, but still Kusunoki is said to be developing. Awww, I sure wish I could settle down in here..."

"Ahhh, developing... that is sooo true... it is sooo doing that..."

Due to a number of reasons, we could assert with no mistake that the land's population was increasing.

And also that the rapid development brought trouble with it.

Meaning that those who became busier and panicky were those with a job that entailed coming between others.

One had to keep up with the acquaintances in one's homeland, that much was certain.

"Regardless, if the roof gets raised around us, so long as we raise our voices in a shrill and girly eek! things will more or less work!"

I taught my mastery of these things to the pure and naive-looking K-san.

"Hu-, huuuh..."

"Clothes and make-up, as well, enough that it does not stand out, enough that it does not make a fool of you."

"Hu-, huuuh..."

"Those who are not loved because they are plain must create their own character, meaning they have it hard, however they might get stressed and fail to gain trust, so in the end they revolve back to their plainness. People who no longer understand the plain ought recall the cheer that there was when they spoke to their mothers back in their homes."

"Hu-, huuuh..."

No good, K-san was not understanding anything I was saying.

Well, people like her did not have trouble with interpersonal things to begin with, however.

"Pi-pi-pi-pi-pi-pi-pi-pi!"

As the time I had set it on came, the table clock (a fairy) uttered the sound of the alarm.

"Ah, look at the time."

"Pi-pi-pi... pi."

I pressed the head of the fairy that was working standing up with a minute and hour hands and his back to the clock face and the alarm was canceled.



"C'mon, let's be done with work. Gotta prepare or we won't make it in time."

Y slammed a file closed.

Today our plan was to head just like we were to the drinking place at the venue.

"Are you leaving?"

The fairy that was acting as bookend on the desk asked us that.

"For a women's meeting."

"How nicesy!"

"Conditions for participation is being a woman. Are you a woman?"

".....which is it... I wonder?"

I went to the toilet to refresh myself.

"Done."

I traced dignified lines that did not discompose the image I gave at first sight. Adult, very adult. Not a nail stood out, not a nail. The skirt down to my mid-calves that I normally wore was perfect.

"Done here, too."

It seemed that Y was conversely going to go for an overbearing and invulnerable, yet fashionable clothes. The impression her face gave was a harsh one, matching it. The style of a woman who could as well wear them as leave them.

The problem was K-san. She went with the default for her job, black uniform and sunglasses.

"Looking forwards to this."

...I am sorry, K-san.

Those clothes were certain to make her the subject of bullying. They stood out. She will be pestered with questions.

But speaking from the results, they would also reduce the mark that I left.

That was because, as for Mrs. Me, I was like, *wow-is-it-true that you can call fairies at will, wow-is-it-true that you are the chief of your office despite being so young, wow-is-it-true that you can use all the rationing tickets you please, whaaat, that-is-so-not-true, rather I am constantly rode hard you see so please come have some tea when you are around, something of the sort.*

While apologetic to K-san in my heart, I was thankful.

"Then we'd better go. Assistant-kun, I leave the place to you."

Assistant-san showed his determination with watching the place while we were gone with a swift bow, and we departed for our front clad in an odd forcefulness.

If I may speak strictly from the results...

The present activities of the Ministry of Women Association was to put out a magazine.

Spearheaded by us.

"Whyyy did it end like this? Well?"

"...one thing led to another."

Y said that, looking uncomfortable.

If I may speak strictly from the process...

The roof was raised pretty high on the women's association. That was fine.

The problem is that it was raised so high that talks went into a bizarre direction.

The Ministry of Women Association had to create something of some sort.

It was not pre-decided what they would have to make.

Such as volunteering for cleaning duty of some type or putting up a play, something recreational that would call out to the people of the Village.

As principle, it was free participation.

That was why it was, I had it, a very limited activity of five to ten people.

As it happened, recently there has been a trend of people moving into the Village.

The number of participants also increased all at once. Because of that, this sensation like, *we have so many people, maybe something amazing will happen?* was more than quite high.

It was Y who put meat before the nose of this starving wolf.

After she was done, we came to this Repentance Party made of just us three from the Office.

"It was sooo much fun."

K-san said that warmly and fuzzily.

...I respected her.

She was inquired into nosily and persistently, but she dodged questions softly without any impact whatsoever on her mood, and best of all, she had this smiling attitude to her that made everyone forgive anything. I could not imitate her.

The latest women's association had 30 participants.

That was plenty.

The Female Gauge was MAX in that place, and that was where Y brought in her Same-Sex Magazines. Right, a real problem.

Let us all do something like that, right, a real problem.

Be nice if the person above the editor had experience indeed if so then let's make it her c'mon, all suddenly asking the impossible, right, a real problem!

"You had us do something we did not need to."

"...yup. I regret everything. The alcohol's to blame."

She did not, she regretted nothing at all. Her eyes were not apologetic.

"You know I'll help."

"I do not want you to simply help, but to take charge of the majority work. Being editor is impossible when we do not even know what the magazine's theme is going to be. You are the one with experience, you do it."

"What I'm gonna do will overflow with the tone of my hobby, is it OK?"

"So long as it is wholesome."

"Then we're gonna go with something in Blue Language."

"What is that?"

"With no Main Contest nor Qualifying Rounds, they're words that indicate contents that are more than clean even among the products drawn to show a relationship between fellow boys that goes past the strictly necessary. Someone spoke it and it became popular. Often abbreviated to its initials, you see."

"There were too many specialized words and I did not understand that."

But what scared me were words I could not infer the meaning of... qualifying rounds?

"Main Contest is when things go as far as they can go, that's what the words mean, so."

"Enough of this."

If I were main editor on something like that, it would defile my good name as UN officer.

"Sigh, there is nothing to be done about it..."

This was the First Gathering of the Ministry of Women Association Editing Committee.

"...is my name. I will be serving as your head editor for this magazine. I am glad to be in your service."

A massive applause from the crowd enveloped me.

"As their next activity, the Ministry of Women Association is making a new magazine, so while I will have little power, I will be editor-in-chief."

Clap clap clap clap, went the massive applause.

I passed my gaze on the participants to this conference while returning them a smile.

"...young. Too young."

The girls in the 15-20 year old range stood out.

Incredible that we would have this many of those animals first in the world for being thorny...

A generation of people five years removed was something else entirely.

Was I going to be able to put reins on them? No, I needed to utilize the experience I had had thus far and bring them under control.

"Now then, about the direction in which we would like to take this magazine we are making..."

"Yes, miss editor! I want to do anything so long as it has to do with clothes! Like, how to sew a cute one-piece, how to sew gloves, how to make accessories, all cute and pop with photographs included!"

"A marvelous proposal. Clothes, then."

I wrote it down on the board in chalk.

A different girl lifted her hand.

"Chief Editor, please let me talk. There is something I find regrettable about this event. The point, specifically, is that I believe that the way we are doing this is lacking pertinent means. I have heard that this plan has been proposed in the get-together a few days ago. Only a part of people had gathered, and therefore the act of guidance on the important issues of the Association is remarkably lacking in fairness, so..."

A bustle began among the crowd.

"Just come out with your proposal!"

"It's your fault for not coming to the Women's Party, isn't it!"

"Everybody had a lot of fun, so don't go picking at it!"

Wah, things suddenly became menacing.

"Please be quiet, everybody! To speak, please do so when pointed at after raising your hands."

I slammed the judge's hammer that I had brought just in case.

"Yes, miss editor!," a different girl raised her hand. "It's about talking after being pointed at, I think it's a significant rule change. Therefore, I think the proposal made before that rule was introduced, the one about the clothing article, should be at least temporarily erased!"

The crowd bustled.

"That's just too fussy!"

"If you did that, then every time the rules changed the conference would require restarting from the beginning."

"What a waste of time, I say!"

The speakers each voiced their opposition.

"It's not too fussy! I believe this is normal! What problem is there if we restart at every rule change? Say it, if you please! If you say it's a waste of time, remember that this is volunteer work, so it's a waste of time in the first place, isn't it? I don't think there's any rule that says we have to use all of our time efficiently!"

"The speaker will please not get excited!," and I struck with the hammer.

"Are you focusing only on me?! Well, it's those people who agitated me to blame!"

"Heckling is also of course forbidden! The speaker will start with raising her hand!"

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes-yees!"

"Yes, chief editor!," went a temperate-looking girl. There were many hands raised, but I pointed at this girl. Help. "I, see~, would like to make an article about something tasty~."

"Let's settle on the rules before we make new proposals!"

"What the-, she just said that heckling is forbidden, didn't she!"

"When does it start being heckling and where does it end? Say it!"

Quack quack quack quack.

I saw the cutesy young girls as a flock of geese.

"...we will have no proposals for the moment and make rules for the discussion beforehand."

I slammed the hammer.

"Yes, chief editor! Then please let me say it," this was the first girl. "First of all, I would like to say that, at a gathering, everyone speaks to each other. There is no point to speaking to each other should the conference be wrested away by a part of the people there. Therefore, I believe that fairness should be very important. Because this conference has been unfair from the first step..."

"...can I comment on this? It's not settled that we should make a magazine, right? If you're opposed you should say you're opposed."

"That's not the point, I'm saying that the problem is how the proposal of making a magazine was made in half-jest at something like a drinking party. That's not something that should ever be done. This is definitely not good, and..."

Heckles flew back and forth.

"At least stop sermonizing!"

"All this talk about unfairness and unfairness and unfairness, just state your proposal!"

"You just want to pick nits at people, don't you?"

I slammed the hammer.

I believed that the hammer held the power to silence people.

"Yes, chief editor!," a different girl raised her hand. "I think we should stop it with the magazine and all that, and go for cleaning up. Truth is, the filth in the square these days is really nasty. This despite how people coming in from outside have increased, which I think makes all that trash an embarrassment."

"Please wait a while for new proposals!"

"I am opposed!"

Another girl uttered just that.

"...to what?"

"To the initial proposal for a clothes article! I would like to write a novel! I came for that alone! Therefore I am opposed to all proposals except for that one!"

These people had much too many personal opinions.

You people should become less individualistic!, went a feeling that I frantically held back from becoming a shout.

"This is my decision as chief editor!," I went and forcibly summarized the discussion. "First, we will, at once and right here, decide by majority vote whether to make a magazine!"

"I am opposed! Though a part of the people at this conference have had strong opinions from the start, a majority decision at this point would simply be going with what was already established, wouldn't it!"

"There's just nothing to be done about it, isn't there!"

"What are you trying to do?!"

Quack quack quack quack!

"There are some that complain about unfairness, but we will take a majority vote regardless! Everybody quiet!"

"I cannot agree to this! I will not participate in an unfair majority vote! Good day, madams!"

The girl stood hard from her seat and went to leave the conference room.

...honestly, that relieved me a little...

"Well then, the result of the majority vote is that we will make a magazine!"

Clap clap clap clap.

We had come to the starting point at last.

"Now then, please restate your opinions regarding what the magazine is to be about."

"Chief editor! I propose we make it a literary magazine! We should raise the influence that the Association has over matters literary!"

"Opposed!"

Someone shouted that.

"Then a love story should be fine!"

"Wait. I don't like that innocent stuff, I like Gothic horror."

"Whaaa, but I just thought we should make it BL."

"Opposed, that's the what!"

Somebody shouted that.

"Girls, please wait! I cannot follow along with writing on the chalkboard... so the votes so far have been clothes, and..."

"Chief editor! Please temporarily reset the votes made before the majority decision! I believe that was what we decided upon..."

"You girls fuss about every little detail!"

"This is getting annoying, so I'll just re-propose it. Chief editor, make it about clothes or something, how about? There, now it's impartial."

"You just said something about horror, didn't you! Don't you propose two things!"

"...what? You can't vote for two things?"

"It's obvious you can't! One per person!"

"I'm not exactly pressing for an ideology here... aren't the more proposals the better?"

"In a situation like this, too many proposals would make things more confused, of course!"

"Do not discuss among yourselves! Raise your hands, please!"

I so did not think that handling geese would be this problematic!

"First of all, based on the ideals of the Ministry of Women Association, shouldn't the most appropriate thing be a cooking magazine?"

"Unless it's more sensational and inflammatory, it won't work! Gossip, I say, gossip! Let's weave it into something that doesn't have one shred of truth to it and that stimulates the readers' worst voyeuristic natures!"

The venue descended into pure chaos. There were none who waited for their appointed turn to speak. They each said whatever they wanted to say.

"It's got to be clothes!"

"Literature!"

"BL!"

"Sweets!"

"Opposed!"

Hoh hoh hoh. It did appear that everybody had entered their say-whatever-they-want-to-say mode.

"Seriously, she's been doing nothing but saying she's opposed, what's wrong with her?!"

"Let's at least decide if it's going to be a novel or a proper magazine!" "Besides, who would be the target reader of this magazine?" "Dunno, everyone in the Village or something." "Where was the goal of this decided!" "Chief editor, please do something!"

"We will decide by majority vote whether this will be a novel or a proper magazine!"

I was subjected to an intense booing but I pushed ahead.

"It has been decided that it will be a proper magazine! From here onwards, please make proposals that fit under the category of potential subjects for a full-magazine coverage!"

"We don't want to do that, we're leaving!"

Several young girls stood up hard from their seats and left.

"For the article, we have clothes, literature, BL, and sweets! Anyone else with proposals?"

"I think those are enough! Let's decide by ballot voting!"

"That's only because your proposal has been picked up!"

"More like, shouldn't we just do them in order! Make it next month's special or something."

"Huh, so this is a monthly publication?"

"Now that you say it, we didn't decide that."

"I'm opposed to monthly publishing!"

Somebody shouted that.

"Isn't quarterly better?"

"Again deciding things without thinking! But without discussion among ourselves, none of the proposals until then will be accepted, understood!"

Though certain terms were settled on, the young ladies quickly dug out another issue and began fighting.

Everybody was just overflowing with vitality.

These girls will definitely bear many children!, I thought.

"I'm fed up with this name-calling under the name of conference! Good-bye!"

The girl stood up hard from her seat and left.

"How does an irregular publication feel like?"

"I'm opposed to an irregular publication!"

"Awww seriously you're pissing me off! Enough already of that girl who's been opposed to everything! I'm gonna beat you up!"

"Chief editor! That was a threat! She used forcible language in a venue of discussion! This is

an unforgivable deed! Please make her vacate her seat!"
"What'm I being blamed for! I said the right thing! Enough! I'm leaving!"
Yet another girl stood up hard.
I only lowered my hammer once.
A gathering of young people resembled a whirlwind.
In the point where there was plenty of trash scattered around wherever it went by.
I continued slamming down the hammer, then casually lifted my head... and there were no more girls there.
".....what?"
Did you people not want to make a magazine?
Are you sure you want to quit after a mere exchange of proposals?
Are you not being too self-important?
"Youthfulness is terrifying..."

"Chuss!"
The fairy raised his voice in victory.
"...mh-hm."
I thought for a moment, then moved a fairy clad in armor to a different square. On it stood a fairy dressed up like a castle.
"Chuss!"
The castle fairy, its place stolen, cried out a shrill *bwaaah!* as he tumbled off and out of the board.
"...hmmm."
Assistant-san, on the opposite side, thought for a long while, then moved a fairy dressed like a knight.
"Chuss!"
His voice loud in victory, he kicked my knight flying.
"Bwaaah!"
"You moved that pawn at last, I see."
I moved the monk fairy that I had preserved for this occasion and eliminated the soldier.
"Chuss!" "Bwaaah!"
Heh heh heh, I was going to win in mere moments.
The loser was to massage the winner's shoulders for ten minutes. This game of chess with a bet on labor was soon to draw to its conclusion!
"...say, miss chief."
Y and K-san stood besides the desk with worried faces.



"What?"

"...in the end, how did the Ministry of Women Association's activity come out as?"

"...it was tomorrow, correct? No way, you're boycotting it... or something?"

The two used tremendously respectful tones, so I smiled wryly.

I felt a little roughed up immediately after the conference, so it was of course tough for these two to talk to me.

But it is all right now. All peace in the heart.

"I am not, it is all decided at this point."

"Decided?"

"If it was not, I would not be casually playing this game."

"I see. That's a relief."

Y looked more relaxed.

"Thought you'd become desperate and just threw it all away. If you haven't, that's OK."

"If you are worrying, then there are some after-effects that involve you, how about?"

"No, that's not... just ten percent of it, I guess."

"Do be at ease. This event is certain to end peaceably."

"Why with the tone of an evil king..."

"Ah, still, I have to make preparations, you see. Could you help me as far as that, miss first-to-propose-something?"

"Please leave it all to me, onee-san!"

A girl with curly hair made her way between Y and K-san in an instant, and I came to look at her.

"....."

She had terrifying eyes.

She was like a girl that had come from Hell.

Now that I said it, there was a panic about this and that, and I never even properly greeted her. I might have done something bad.

As much as I ignored her, let us talk to her with a familiar and light tone. That would be the nice thing to do.

"Pleased to meet you, young lady, I am the chief of this Office of Mediation, so..."

"I quit my job to move here!"

"....."

She cut back with tremendously perfect timing. Honestly, I had taken her lightly. I shuddered. That was how, later, Y would speak of that moment.

Also, at that time she too used a light tone but I think that hers was a generally harsh way of speaking. It was a glimpse into her sadistic true character. I shuddered.

I also heard that she added that.

In practice, it was true that what Curly Hair was saying was terrifying, so I gradually lost my words. I could not ignore her entirely.

"...you... quit... so despite being unemployed... you moved here, is that so...?"

"We're speaking at last!"

"That kind of thing... it is just not normal, you know...?"

"I quit the job as a result of sufficient analysis. Right now I'm working part-time at Y-senpai's place."

"You quit the UN... and took a part-time for the UN, then..."

"And I would like you not to misunderstand this."

Curly Hair swiftly held out the palm of her hand.



"I have most certainly not come here lightheartedly. It's just, Kusunoki is more active than my old job, so that came as the result of thinking through about my future."

...she had just thrown it all away.

My instinct was certain of that despite there not being any real reason. After all... this girl was young!

Awww, curse these youngsters who quit their job so early!

I was sure that at any generation youngsters were like this, however... no matter how hard the job was, going out of one's way to cross the sea and move in was sooo not done. She was too free.

"And isn't it nice, this makes it merrier!"

K-san put her hands together and said that happily.

Well, it was fine.

"So, what do you need my help with?," went Y.

A fun (or expected such) Sunday had come.

The girls of the Village had gathered in small groups in a somewhat tall hill outside the Village. This was to be the day when we work on the Ministry of Women Association's task, as they were previously informed of.

There were participants from that conference, but there were also girls who had come today for the first time.

The participants from the conference had cooled their heads, it appeared, because they had awkward faces.

"Good morning! Now, I would like us to begin the local activity of the Ministry of Women Association!"

I shouted in the megaphone.

"So, what will we do? Well, we have not prepared anything to do! How about cleaning up all this magnificent nature?"

Someone somewhere will say something to the effect of the meeting leaving a bad impression. I was at 100 percent impudence. ...I did not mind.

As I learned to do from K-san, I gave a gentle smile like I was the goddess of the land.

"Today I would like everyone to write a message card."

"A message card?"

"Yes. Please write whatever message you want on what we are distributing right now."
 Assistant-san and the others were going around distributing message cards and pens.
 "Once you are done writing, put it in this box!"
 We had prepared a robust vanity case.
 "And then?," went someone.
 "We bury it here!"
 "...what's the point?"
 "As theme of the message, please make it what you would like to tell yourself in 10 years. You are sending words to your own self in ten years."
 They were all taken aback.
 "I-, in other words?"
 "This is a recreational device known as a time capsule. Your present feelings will be buried with the capsule and reach your future self, it is a game of greeeat patience. We will be digging it out in 10 years. And so you will remember the time... which would be now... and be able to bask in the nostalgia of it."
 The girls' faces promptly shone.
 "Sounds interesting!" "Amazing!" "God!" "Nice one thinking that out!" "What else, of course!"
 The girls who were not sincerely rejoicing included the girls who had stormed off from that meeting back then.
 Still, well... I was going to let bygones be bygones.
 "M-saaan, we brought it!"
 K-san and her black uniform people carried in a large trolley.
 "We brought tea and sweets, so we will be having a tea break. Think carefully about the message while you drink, please!"
 What came next was comfortable, the girls made merry with one another.
 Despite having been so belligerent, at present they were surrounding the same table and smiling.
 Truly, I did not quite understand all that...
 "We more or less finished setting the table, I guess it is about time we write, as well."
 I handed over cards and pens.
 "I've forgotten what message I wanted to write."
 "Happens."
 Y smiled.
 K-san and Curly Hair were enjoying their tea.
 "This event here, it's really popular." "It was worth it to talk with each other, wasn't it!" "We can say that this success came from everybody's strengths!" "Truly, I'm glad that I was opposed to the magazine, yes." "It was the right answer!" "Our tastes are nothing to scoff at."
 "....."
 The faces of Y and K-san, who knew the situation, went restlessly between the girls and me.
 "...I do not mind, not really,"
 I told the two.
 "I am the one in charge and so I must take the responsibility. That much I accept, you see. It does not hurt my mood at all. Truly, not at all, not even a bit, not even a grain of sand's worth. It is not a lie. I was never the type to hold grudges of that sort, understand."
 I spoke on and on to take away the worries of the two as I took pen in hand.
 And on that message card with vines drawn on its borders I wrote down all my heart with all I had.

"To me 10 years from now. Do you remember? When you buried this capsule, you really had it hard, right? You are me, so you understand, correct? Well, see, I do not understand even a fraction of what young girls these days are really thinking, and—"

(Year **** supplemental)

Now that I say it, we forgot when we buried the time capsule.

Since it has been many dozen years since then, there are none who remember anymore.

It was fun, so I am leaving it as it is. It is possible that future people dig it up and get confused.

That would be quite the amazing fun to be had, yes. Do you not think so?

The Fairies and Tableware *Folklore*, The Secret Tool

I love holy swords.

But I say no-thank-you to devil swords.

This was the house of the Mediator.

Tonight she had invited her Assistant and they were having a meal.

"Having steak once in a while is good, is it not."

The Mediator was delighting herself in the first meat meal in a while.

Kusunoki Village was abundant with food. And still, meat besides chicken rarely appeared on the market, making it a delicacy.

"...still, it is mutton, so it is a little hard."

Mutton referred to the meat of an adult sheep.

Kusunoki's sheep were psychologically delicate, and it often happened that they would die of shock or of suicide, so one could eat of them comparatively often. The sheep prided themselves with being the ruling aristocrats of this land, and the stress that came from it made it a disease of the modern age, you see.

Mutton was adult meat, so its cut was hard, and the two were having it with a moderately strong sauce.

That was why red wine was really suited to it.

The Mediator sipped of the red wine that she had been gifted.

"How to put it, this wine... is a full-bodied... in acidity....."

She tried to say something, but she stopped.

The Mediator was trying to do a taste-testing of the wine, but she gave up.

This wine has a fermented scent that reminds of red fruit, and behind that, a strongly stimulating feeling like it was sunk in a pinch of pepper... that was what she was trying to say, you see.

Even without a sense for the poetic, she appeared suited to the taste of alcoholic beverages.

For his own, the Assistant had grape juice poured in his glass. It looked like he had not drunk from it at all.

"...!"

The knife flung off from the Assistant's hand and tumbled to the floor.

The meat was hard, and so he accidentally used too much force.

The Mediator stopped the Assistant as he was going to pick it back up.

"That is nothing for you to go pick up yourself. Good manners is to leave it to the waiter."

With that being that, the Assistant waited.

A waiter, now, from where would one appear?

The Mediator stood from her seat and took a new knife from the dining utensils shelf.

He gave thanks as he received it, then once again began cutting the steak.

However, the knife slipped from his hands yet again.

"Quite the formidable steak, is it not."

Restraining the Mediator as she went to stand up again, the Assistant headed to the dining utensils shelf by himself.

There were many dining utensils crammed in the drawer.

".....?"

Among the knives, forks, spoons and all those general utensils, he found a single oddly

shining knife.

Its design was also a little different from that of the others.

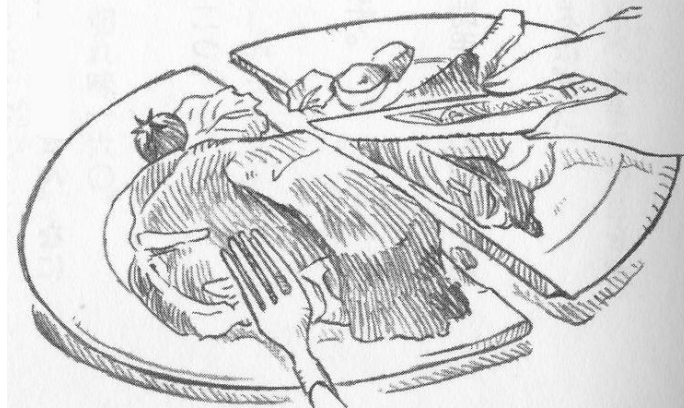
It felt just a little bit prettier.

The Assistant's eyes shone bright.

With the troublesome knife in hand, he returned to the dinner table.

He sunk the blade into the tough meat. When he did...

"Assistant-san...?! You cut through the plate! You pushed too hard!"



".....~~~!!!"

The Assistant's knife cut in twain that hard meat and the plate with it.

"...welcome to you!"

The Assistant entered the general store.

The owner was a bald middle-aged man. The era being the era, this shop was a hobby for him.

It was just that, due to the increase in population of late, it was becoming pretty profitable.

That was why they were aggressive with the new items on sale.

The Assistant checked out the dining utensils corner.

It was usually normal utensils, but occasionally something extraordinary was there, too.

It was somewhat difficult to distinguish them for a beginner, but the Assistant could tell.

...there it was.

It was a special knife unlike all the others. A knife that could cut like a sword, with exceptional sharpness and durability.

To call it... it was a Legendary Dining Utensil.

"Thanks for all the bizness!"

The Assistant purchased the Legendary-tier Knife and returned home.

"....."

He wanted to cut something hard as a test, wasn't there anything hard that he had?

There was.

It was bread that had become hard. The attack power of smaller knives could no longer stand up to it. Whatever else, the attack power of a small knife was no more than five.

But a knife with attack power 180—

A stab later, and despite not being forceful with it at all, the bread was cut in half.

"...so strong."

The Assistant gazed at the knife, satisfied.

He noticed that the word *Lævateinn* was engraved on the handle in tiny characters.

"*Lævateinn*. The legendary weapon that appears in Norse mythology..."

The Assistant was very knowledgeable about these things. As evidence, the first two lines of this were a recording of one of the Assistant's soliloquies.

If his memories were correct, this magical weapon had been bestowed with an attack bonus versus chickens.

The Assistant eyed the smoked chicken that had been left hanging in the kitchen and which had become hard. He was not very good at keeping up with his foodstuff.

The Assistant moved the chicken to a plate and dug in with a sharp stab.

When he did he heard a sizzling sound as the meat burned, and the smoked chicken was instantaneously turned into a burned chicken that oozed meaty juices. After eight more cuts, it seemed to be generally edible.

The Assistant gazed at *Lævateinn* with captive eyes.

After that, the Assistant went looking for legendary weapons by walking about the Village.

The legendary fork *Gunngir* he discovered in a farmhouse.

Stabbed with it, even meat that did not really take to flame would be steadily cooked, making for delicious food. Attack power 125.

The legendary knife *Gram* had been on the ground in a trash dump.

This tampered with memories and cut food into gram units. Attack power 160.

Tyrfinn happened to be in his own house.

That was a cursed piece of cutlery, and though its attack power surpassed 250, it had the negative effect of reducing the flavor of the food cut with it.

That was probably why everything he made of late did not taste very good.

Mjollnir was a legendary meat-pounding hammer. Attack power 320. Boasting high attack power, this made any sort of meat tenderized as a pre-process, however the struck meat could only be used for broths.

The Assistant's collection had increased significantly.

He was happy.

Right now, there was no food that the Assistant couldn't cook.

If he wanted to have walnuts, he could use *Durandal*, which was said to be able to bisect any armor, and cut them in two.

If he had food that had spoiled, he could stab it with the legendary fork *Longinus*, and it returned to being fresh.

Now just who could be making these things and scattering them around the Village? Sad to say that he didn't know... just kidding. Even a child that, say, still believed in Santa would be able to tell that this was the work of the fairies. Legendary tableware, wasn't it just marvelous? Whatever else, the impulse to collect them was powerful.

Ton ten kan ten.

The sound of metal being pounded could be heard in some backyard.

What was once a brick oven made for the head of a family to make BBQ was now the forge of the fairies.



"We're making them!" "We're fixing them!" "We're strengthening them!" "Leave evolving them to us!" "Gather rare ingredients, getcha legendary tableware!"

The head of the household wanted to call friends over and do some barbecue, but though he dreamed of that situation, in the end he moved away from the Village without using it even once. An effective usage, the fairies'.

Their pounding on the fork incessant, the boss suddenly turned just his head and said this.

"We're doing good work?"

The beautiful sweat of hard labor shone bright!

Beautiful or not, this was the outflow of the current Fairy-Tale Disaster. With victims having not yet surfaced, this onrush of legendary tableware had been scattered throughout the Village.

"What'do we make next?" "Shuriken!" "Storm Bringer!" "How do we decide the penetration?"

"Can't we increase the stuffing?" "The basics of that argument may be poorly crafted!" "No way of making it, the files are spoiled!" "Sword Breaker, when touched the other tableware breaks!"

They very much want to make some more!

The Assistant sought more powerful legendary tableware, so he set out on a journey (a walk).

And then he entered the woods.

As he did, he found the Mediator laying in wait there.

"Ah, nee-san... why are you here?!"

"I noticed what you were trying to do several days ago. However, I am willing to let it slide."

The Mediator had realized the reason behind the Assistant's odd movements.

The Assistant had a personality that got excessively stealthy due to the way the world was built, however it appeared difficult to escape the eyes of the Mediator.

"...why did you let me get so far?"

"Well... recovering the fairies' Secret Tools on my own is annoying, so..."

"Ahhh..."

It was the Mediator being herself as usual.

"Anyway, there were quite a few of them given around, so when I realized the situation, I thought I would give up recovering them. But by then I already knew of your motions behind the scenes, Assistant-san."

An eccentric hunger for gathering that only a true collector would have, or maybe... that was what it was all about.

"And now look. That is the last of the legendary tableware."

Where she pointed at with a swish was a knife embedded in a rock.

It was a lavishly crafted knife. The most spectacularly and finely crafted one of all so far.

"T-, this is... no way..."

"It appears to be the legendary tableware *Excalibur*. It has been thrust into a whetstone. The previous owner had thrust it in there to sharpen it, then tossed it away without removing it. He wanted his collaborator to grow stronger and remove it, but it appears you cannot do so if you do not meet the qualifications... and no one so far has succeeded. Assistant-san, what do you think about yourself in that regard?"

The Assistant approached *Excalibur*.

It was of beautiful make... and he wanted to obtain it at all costs.

"Then I leave you to that job. While you do that, I will put up a sign that says that illegally dumping dangerous goods is forbidden."

"....."

The tangible smell of life did lower the Assistant's spirits a little bit, but he regained his composure and put his hand on the handle. He all too easily removed the knife. Congrats. The legendary holy knife Excalibur had the attack power at a majestic 500. As special effect, it bestowed the same sovereignty rights that had been granted to the Mediator when she had lived a wandering life on that island sometimes in the past. The Assistant held Excalibur up high.



You have completed the collection, congratulations!

"...it's been two weeks since then."

Resting his hands from work, the Assistant's memories suddenly rushed to that. He had completed the collection of the legendary tableware series, but there still existed many many more, countless more, legendary weapons hidden throughout history. However, those blacksmith of once went,

"Meowler!"

"AwHn!" "Piii!" "Noooh!" "Farewell, little me!"



How could a flesh-and-blood human that could not even use magic like the Assistant ever learn that they were attacked by a stray cat and disbanded?

"Next could come an Eastern mythology series... how about that?"

The Assistant even now eagerly awaited a second Legendary Tableware Series.

Record of the Job of the Two

...inspections.

We had gone out for inspections. It was work.

"Good morning, nee-san."

Assisting was Assistant-san (as obvious).

"Good morning. Eh? No, I will not say to wait a minute. The clothes? Thank you. K-san had them tailored as a thank-you for some sweets. They stand out a little, but what is the point of this season if you do not have clothes that fit, right. So, are you going with your Sunday best today as well, Assistant-san? It really suits you. That slanted bag makes you look like a mailman, it is casual and perfect on you. And all that aside, today's weather is fine, I am so happy."

Since we had been doing desk jobs for the last while, working outside felt refreshing.

We looked forwards to it (though entirely as work).

Now then, the first observation post was the statue of the pond owl, which was also often used as a meeting point for couples. In other words, this place here.

That statue of a bird standing in the center of a fountain pond had been built only recently, it was said.

"Sorryyy, did I make you wait?" "Nah, I've just arrived! (he had been waiting for an hour)"

"I apologize, what a wicked person I am for making you wait!" "It's all right, I'll have you repay me with today's date."

"Honey, you're so pretty today!" "You too, darling. That pompadour you have even today just sells it, yes."

"...it's all couples around here! What kind of place are you making us meet at?!" "S-, sorry, let's hurry away from here... I can't stand to be here, I'm gonna die..."

Gazing at the surroundings he saw that there were many couples of men and women (some women and women) waiting for each other there.

It appeared that there were no people who did not know each other in that place.

"Good, it appears that the owl statue presents no problems."

Assistant-san nodded, saying he agreed with the results of my 'visual surveillance'.

"And this place is quite the good place to use as meeting area."

The pond owl statue stood out a fair bit, however the location was far from the main street and its location difficult to find.

It was the ideal spot when needing to meet someone away from prying eyes.

That being said, a fairy wearing a fish on his head slushed out of the owl statue's mouth, which startled me.

"Meeting in a place like this, is this fate?"

"M-, mister fairy. S-, so that is true... you people are indeed everywhere..."

The fairy looked at us and the couples surrounding us in turn, then,

"...pleasure?"

"No, we are here for work."

"But you look so much like you're here for pleasure..."

"I only took off my lab coat, this is work. We are observing."

"Would you put that in writing?"

"Mister fairy, I am going to give you sweets."

"Aaaaay!"

I conferred him one piece of jelly bean.

"I shall also give you this."

I conferred him one chocolate biscuit engraved with a sailing ship.



"T-, this is a double feature..."

"If you do not go hide and eat them, someone might steal them away from you."

I whispered that at his ear.

"I must have them all by myself!"

The fairy held the sweets in his arms and rushed away who knows where.

To fairies, the ingredients of sweets as rearranged by human hands were a delicacy that caused euphoria. The important part was that the sugar was translated by humans, mere honey or fruits not intervened by human hands were not highly valued by fairies.

To compare, let us go with sound. Even the same sound, when heard in random noise one would not think much of it, but, of course, in a beautiful melody or in words of praise made one feel happy.

All else aside, the fairies liked it that way, and that was all.

"Now then, shall we head for the next place to inspect?"

A fair bit of time had passed since then.

I had gotten a little bit used to my daily life as the chief of the Office.

Of late, the population of Kusunoki had increased by leaps and bounds.

People might become capable of building high-rise buildings by the time I became one of the elderly.

And so, with this generation acting this way, I had barely averted my eyes and, of all things, a new facility had appeared.

Consequently, we went to inspect it.

"I wonder, which place should we go to for our second inspection? How about going to this 'movie theater' or whatever it is?"

Assistant-san had no differing opinion and nodded.

So it was that we approached the movie theater or whatever it was called, finding it was underground in a mixed-use building. The top part had sort of collapsed on it...

An elderly lady was sitting across a long table set outdoors.

"Want a movie? Tickets for one person are one rationing ticket. Yes, thank you very much. Go down to the lower floor there. It's ten minutes to the next projection, so take your time and find seats you like as you wait, all right? Ah, we got popcorn and iced tea over there, take one set per person, all right!"

We headed down with a mountain of popcorn and drink in hand.

"...this used to be a nuclear shelter once, it did."

We walked down corridors with no decorations to them, passed through a clearly airtight door, and came out to a fairly wide space.

"Ohhh, so this is a movie theater, I see."

There was a screen at the very front. Plenty of chairs were lined up. It looked like it could seat about forty people.

The chairs were possibly scrounged around, as each of them had a different shape.

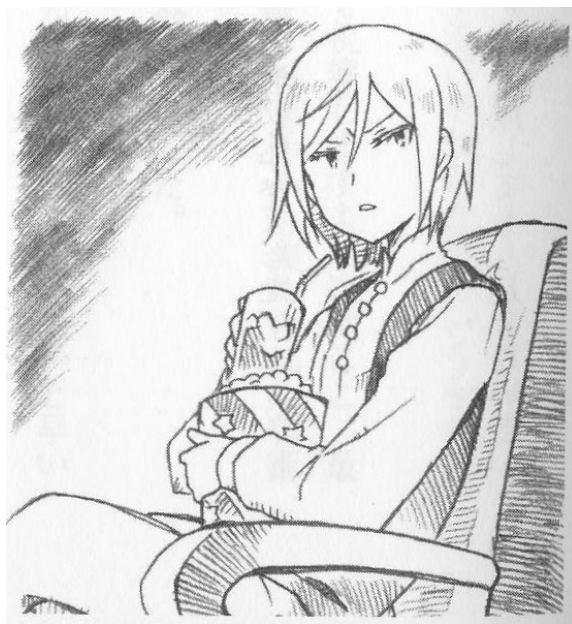
Around half had viewers in them. Quite the prosperous endeavor, it could be said.

"Let us sit here."

We sat in a space with two free seats side by side and,

"...yo, partner."

Y was in the next seat.



"...why are you here?"

I worked hard to wear my indifference as I asked that.

"I'm the producer of this movie theater. More importantly..."

An icy glare went first to Assistant-san, then to me.

"...what do you think you're doing, exactly?"

"Thinking of doing, about what?"

"No, well, there's Assistant-kun, and, well, I mean..."

Something sharp-ish rose to my temples.

This person... she was shaking!

If she was, then I had a chance. I could press through.

I did my utmost to feign calmness, acting as my normal self as I shifted to the attack.

"What are you talking about, silly. This is work, that is all, work. And that is why I am going to have you help me right now."

"Ahhh, work... right, work."

She made a face that was half convinced and half like something was off.

"Recently we have had many entertainment facilities forming without permission, so we are inspecting them."

"T-, that so... uh-huh..."

For the time being, the scale seemed to have tipped over to her being persuaded.

"W-, well, here we got a policy of healthiness that doesn't require inspection, see. Since you came all the way here, you'd better enjoy it... hahahah..."

...it appeared I had managed to get through this somehow.

And still, those eyes she occasionally gave me...!

My instinct sounded a warning, telling me that I ought be careful with her.

"...I was sure I had not let my guard down around her, so her appearing out of nowhere was unbelievable."

We left the movie theater as if running away, mingled with the crowd, and rushed into the cramped back alleys of the houses.

"It doesn't look like Y-nee-san is tailing us."

Assistant-san said that as he surveyed the bustling main streets.

Tailed.

To put it bluntly, she was the kind of person who would do something like that. No matter how well one prepared it would never be enough.

Eh? Why do I have to be so prepared, you ask?

There are many dynamics that occur between two women of same graduation year as well as same age.

But I understand how it feels. If she had tried to steal my march she would have been in the way, that was what friendship was about.

"...all within the imaginable. Next we will inspect the most unlikely place for her to be at. Next will be here, the recently-completed Imperial Museum. Back in the age when this country was an empire it gathered many works of art from all over the world, and those are now on exhibition."

It was fashionable, even Assistant-san said that as we moved there.

It was by all mean a private home.

"Visitors to the museum? Sorryyy, at the moment we're having lunch. We lunch a little early here, you see. If you'd like, you could come eat with us!"

So went the middle-aged lady's passionate welcome.

We passed through a plain and normal house kitchen and sat on the seats.

Plain table, plain interior, plain Tutankhamen mask. A cat was gazing towards the entrance on the windowsill.

"Well now, welcome!"

That was a middle-aged man that seemed to be the head of the household. He was the scholarly type.

"Yooo, you came too~, welcome~!"

An even older man, who looked to be the father of the of the lady or of the husband, swiftly offered us a container the color of gold filled with wine.

"H-, hello... I apologize for coming at lunchtime."

"I got a son and he has a wife, but they're in a different land, you see. You two married?"

"D-, do you now... no, we are co-workers, I am the boss and he is the Assistant... this is work."

"Come on now, have some food! I'm just gonna keep cutting up them pickles."

They served us a massive portion of fried fish and french fries.

The old lady kept on cutting pickled onions on the chopping board.

"It was a most delicious meal."

"You had enough already? We got pickles, you know?"

My stomach was full from the massive serving of fries. And so the lunch I had packed went to waste. Well, it was going to be fine if we used it for dinner, though.

When we finished eating it was noon exactly.

"I apologize to you both. We open the museum at noon, so we made you eat early."

After lunch, while for some reason lifting the table's boards and moving them away, the husband explained.

"I have it that there is a museum with a certain pedigree around here, is it perhaps close by?"

"Hah hah, you're good at jokes, little lady. The Imperial Museum is here, see."

The scholarly type older man smiled brightly at the center of a simple house's kitchen.

"...I must point out that there are no exhibits?"

"Well now, well now. Do you really think that? How about a closer look?"

The husband spread his arms wide.

"I-, is that...!"

What I thought was a plain table's foundation was the base of a pillar that spoke of the ages!

What I thought was a plain interior design was a creepy stone statue!

What I thought was a plain Tutankhamen mask was a not-plain-at-all golden mask!

"HyeeeeEEEH!"

This house used museum pieces as daily necessities!

Also, the cat was a Bastet statue. The goblet the older man was drinking wine from indeed had to be from the BC era. There were other items here and there that were all clearly from the BC era.

"Are you sure this is all right! This is scandalous, historically speaking, are you aware?!"

"Yeah, but this house has been like this for many generations, see. We were all, more or less, proper owners of the artifacts. Besides, we only learned recently that these were artifacts. It may be that in the distant past we were actually and really the people who ran a museum."

The husband cackled.

"If you wish, invite all your friends and come again. Leaving? Then have some pickles. They're good, I'm confident about that."

The older lady offered them to us as they were still on the chopping board.

There were something like ancient letters engraved on the surface of the gray chopping board.

"...may I say that this chopping board appears to be exuding the tastes of the BC era?"

"Ahhh, this? It's called the Rosetta Stone. In the distant past it was very big, but now it has fragmented and eroded, so it's gotten very small, you see."

I nearly fainted.

This is what a humanity in decline looks like!

"...huh?"

And the next thing I noticed was that I was walking outside.

I was dragging Assistant-san's hand. The memories I had of what happened from that point on had vanished in an instant.

"You seemed to be in a daze, and were rude," went Assistant-san.
"So I see... well, that aside..."

There had been events so intensely shocking they had, well, numbed me in several ways.
"By the way, these people who are walking ahead have clothes of a color that feels like I have seen somewhere."

A lady in black pantsuit walked steadily walked, seemingly towards us.

"My, it's you two, good day. Are you on an outing? That's nice!"

K-san said that in a tone like the sun in Spring.

"Pleased to see you."

I answered with as work-like a tone as I could.

"P-, pleased to see you too. Today our section is working, you see. It's our traditional Working the 'Grass'... we are mowing the lawns around the community center. That may probably be the most correct way of saying that. Despite how it's Sunday and that we really didn't want to do this."

She sounded too excited for her to dislike any of that.

"Well, that is for certain. We seem to both dislike working on a Sunday."

K-san tilted her head in puzzlement.

"...so you are working as well?"

"Truth is, we are. We are investigating the psychological influence that the Village's entertainment locations gives to the residents..."

"So that's what it was!," K-san believed me. This was a woman who could believe in things.

She was someone who would start everything from *believing*. "Then let me accompany you!

There are other people mowing the lawns, so it's all right!"

"No, thank you."

"S-, so I see. Disappointmeeeent!"

I was sorry, I understood that it was a proposal that came from a good, honest place, but... truly, I was sorry.

"Come now, these are top-secret inspections, standing out would be... right?"

"If you say that, then it's true. Being together would mean standing out, so it would be difficult to do."

"Well, of course. Then see you sometimes later. ...ah, this job of ours, please keep it secret."

"Keeping things secret is my specialty~!"

"That is marvelous~!"

"Thank you very much~!"

"Then, see you sometimes later~!"

The good mood dropped on the dot as we parted.

"I believed that I chose spots for inspection where my friends would normally not go, but it appears that it being a holiday puts everybody in different locations..."

It was a miscalculation.

But we will be all right from here on out. Our next inspection was going to take us right outside the Village. Neither Y nor K-san would show up there, of course.

Standing on a somewhat tall hill, the Kusunoki Skymark Tower was the biggest windmill in the Village.

Not used for agriculture, it was a pure unadulterated tourist destination built quite recently. It was still undergoing construction in part, but it was already cleared for the general public.

Total height was eighteen meters. It was a building about five floors high.

The interior was allocated to tenants, meaning anyone wishing it could set up a shop. Right now it was all empty, but it was going to be fully filled not far in the future.

The top floor was an observation deck, and one could have a view into the wilderness and mountains as well as the town itself.

"Myyy, it is tall. It feels even taller since we are on a hill."

The handrail was sturdy. It was firm under the feet. It felt perfectly safe. Nothing else to say!

What was particularly wonderful was how this was a popular spot where no acquaintances would come. I could use this place. Or so I thought, because,

"A very good day to you both!"

"....."

P-ko-san was working on top of the scaffold installed in the wall.

She was holding a bundle of poles that looked heavy.



"...doing hard work despite being Sunday, I see, what a thing."

My smile might have been a strained one.

"Every day feels like Sunday, so it doesn't bother me. I'm using the electricity generated by the windmill on location, so it's easy to work here. O-taro is also working over there. By the way, you both being out on a day like this..."

"It is for work."

"So that's what it was! After all, an upgrade to chief means the gain on labor had to have leaped upwards as well."

Her personality was direct, so she believed me quickly.

"Please, do your best with your hard labor! Ours is a secret mission, so I would like you to keep it under wraps. See you!"

I lifted up one hand stat and left the place as if running away from it.

"Nee-san... aren't things a little bit off in how they're going..."

"We go on to the next one, yes, on to the next!"

I will agree that I had become nearly utterly stubborn.

It was Sunday festival at the poorhouse.

It was an event that had children singing in order to get contributions of old clothes and food.

It was the type of event where my acquaintances were most unlikely to come at.

"...my, onee-san?"

Curls was there. She was the receptionist. That was unexpected.

As far as I could think, this was the chance meeting I had most need to avoid.

"T-, this is the most unlikely place to find you... what are you doing here?"

"I am volunteering, is there a problem?"

"What, you were that nice a person?!"

...ah, still, I got the feeling this girl did normally feel like she would be doing that... things that were simply weird remained simply weird.

"More importantly, you, onee-san, why are you..." Curly Hair sharply examined my surroundings. "...here all alone?"

"...what?"

I looked at my side and found Assistant-san standing there. He should be visible to Curly Hair. But his location, angle, and mood to him... everything faded into the scenery and he became a background character.

This is what you'd call a stealth technique. I could also say that Assistant-san's specialty was hiding between the lines. Due to personal circumstances, Assistant-san's standards were different, it was a device that rendered him partially imperceptible.

Regardless, that was difficult to do with people who were acquainted with him, but against Curly Hair, whom he had met not few days before, that seemed to work. It helped.

"...exactly, I am alone, doing a single's solo work."

"But if you had told me I would've come along with you! Ah, it's about time for the next performance to start. Please enjoy it."

I contributed a bottle of sweets I was carrying to Curly Hair and sat down in an empty seat before the open air stage.

"Assistant-san, well done..."

"That person is sort of a bother, isn't she."

Assistant-san had perhaps also felt her scattershot danger, because he looked tense.

The production of the children was a musical, and it was so shockingly well done it surprised me.

A little girl with patchwork clothes (wearing an armband with '*stage director*' on it) was nodding along. Ahhh, it was her. She had pointed out what parts of the production were No Good, right. Though, for some reason, it felt like the patchwork clothes she was wearing were high-class.

"The fishing pond! Young girls will most definitely not come here! This should be the kind of healing spot that people ten years and older can use."

We headed to the pond with those expectations when,

"Ohhh, it's you! You're fishing as well, are you? (seeing Assistant-san) Hoh? I see now. You settled for who you had close by. That's also a good thing, I would say."

The VIP Boss was enjoying a country-like holiday.

"T-, this is work."

"...mh-hm. Did your job include that, now? Don't recall that it does."

"This is independent work..."

"An impressive concern, but holidays ought be enjoyed as holidays. Work proactively as the norm, but forget work during the weekend. This is the way a first-class business person does things. Next week I'll be at the beach, drinking tropical drinks. Working during the holidays is an economic animal's way, you understand."

"Well, of course I agree entirely with what you say. They biting?"

"So-so, I'd say. Come now, you should fish, too. Fishing is also hunting. Makes one's wildest blood roar. Enjoy a Great Hunt!"

He gave a thumbs up so unnatural it was like there was a recording camera right there.

I got rental fishing poles and free low-quality bait (high quality bait required paying rationing tickets), and we both fished.

Fishing pond. That was fun. I fished a trout.

"Gonna go back to my home and have a friend barbecue these, do you two want to come?"

"How many people will be there?"

"Hum. I don't have that many friends. A mere hundred people!"

"...truth is that today's unpaid overtime is about investigating improprieties."

I told a vague story that I made up on the spot about improprieties.

When he had finished listening, the Boss's face instantly changed into that sultry-looking smile that he always had.

"...that won't do. You two have a duty to resolve the matter. The burden is heavy for someone just promoted to the new chief, but I still leave the matter firmly in your hands. Also, you really shouldn't tell about this to just anyone. That's how I feel about it. Make sure not to forget to write a report after you're done."

I ended up with a bunch of rationing tickets...

Keep it as secret as you can, the Boss insisted as he left.

"...well, now I do not have to talk my way out of this anymore."

The both of us felt exhausted.

Spending long hours out in the sun made us feel like teensy asteroids ready to melt.

"It's a good job, is it not?"

"It is, but of course a little, well..."

Six PM. About time for dinner.

I have an idea, went Assistant-san as he took me with him as we were part of the way home, leading me to an old cottage next to the river which had been repurposed into a café.

Oftentimes, these things had a proprietor that opened up as a hobby, the majority of them were bring-your-own-drinks-and-food.

Because of that, they had a strong feeling of plainness, something like young boys and girls selling lemonade in front of their homes, and it was a constant that they were far from flourishing, but... this one instead felt very flourishing.

"Huuuh, a reading café. Huh."

It took a little time to find open seats.

There were bookshelves on the walls that reached the ceiling, and there was a massive number of books there. This seemed to be the type of café where you could eat and drink while reading the book you wanted.

There were so many books that I became a little bit excited.

The genres of books one might want had... no great variety.

"These are all in one genre..."

A warning signal began ringing within my brain.

About half were literary works, but the remaining was oddly... look, see, you understand, do

you? They were books of *that* sort. A line-up of texts that related to people who shared a specific hobby.

"Nee-san, the books here... they're oddly all of that type."

Assistant-san seemed to have noticed, too.

"Indeed, besides, the clientele looks to be all women... let us leave, Assistant-san. This place is dangerous."

But right as we made the swift decision to leave the café!

".....!"

"What is it?"

"...nothing, it just felt like someone was watching us."

I felt a strong gaze on our backs coming from inside the café, was that my imagination?

I could not spot any familiar face.

We left the reading café behind with quick feet.

It was about the right time for the sun to set. I wish we could have said our goodbyes then, but...

"...shall we have our packed lunches?"

Assistant-san nodded firmly.

"Then we should go somewhere that does not attract people's eyes and we can relax... right over there would be fine, would it not?"

But right as we sat down on a bench set right in front of an old home and opened our packed lunches!

".....!"

"What is it?"

"We are being looked at. Someone is staring at us."

I could not ascertain who it was, but I definitely felt a sticky gaze.

"This place is dangerous. Let us leave. Synchronize on me, I will give you a signal and we will jump into that area with the tall grass."

We used the bright shine of the sun setting as cover and nimbly moved off the bench.

"Tsk! Spotted!"

I heard a click of a tongue behind us, but we ignored it and ran.

We moved without a sound while I used my hand mirror to see what was behind me without turning, and I saw Y nimbly dropping down next to the bench. So she was hiding on the rooftop...

"No carelessness or vulnerability with her, is it."

Just going back home like this was sort of frustrating... whatever else, I thought we would eat through this packed lunch somewhere.

"There is another location near here. Let us go there!"

We took each other's hand as we moved away.

"Dear me, so we meet again."

"Wah!"

We had happened upon K-san.

I said my farewell without waiting for a reply and went on to a different path. As per my job, I knew the land well.

"Ah, it's sensei, yes! There's that Assistant guy too!"

"Wah!"

I encountered my pupils!

I retreated along the route I had come in.

A different hiding place... hiding place...

"Oh, squad leader... no, miss boss."

"Wah!"

I encountered a mech girl.

Retreat.

"Good evening, ma'am!"

Encountered a pocket-sized mech girl. Retreat.

"Baaah."

There was a sheep I maybe know. Something the Third or the Fourth. This should have been all right, but it bothered me so, just in case, retreat.

"Onee-sa-"

Retreat.

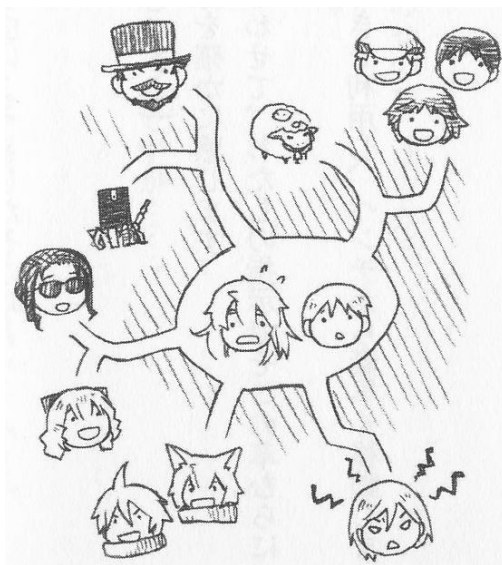
"Hah hah hah, why, so you did want to have some meat, right? It's all right, it's all right, HEY!

Nick, can you add a thick one for my subordinates? Wait, where are you going, 'oi!"

That was the Boss' houuuse!

"There you are! You were right there! C'mon, all you cameramen working for me, take a picture as proof of these two! For each Super Photo you take I'll give you one ticket!"

Y was employing people?! Retreat.



"Does that mean that there are no more safe spots in this Village...?"

The two of us held hands as we frantically ran away. As to why we were so frantic in not wanting to be detected, that was a mystery, if I said so myself. A mystery, indeed, that was what it was. And what a problem that was.

We ran and ran and ran away, but wherever we went we encountered someone, and it was about time for us to run out of stamina with which to run away.

A tumbling sound and I found that a fairy (Rounded Up) had dropped at my feet.

Assistant-san and I looked at each other.

"Humans and fairies are beings that, cut and cut as you will, cannot be separated. I knew it, it had to end like this."

Indeed so, and he smiled as well.

I was going to end this as I always did.

"Mister fairy, mister fairy, I have a mushroom-shaped chocolate biscuit."

"...sweetly sweets... ah, a master human?"

I muttered what I wanted to the fairy that had woken up.

I smoothly scattered round candy in the direction my chasers were coming from.

I did it like throwing grenades, "one, two... three!" and scattered them about.

There was a sound like a firework going off. Next came people screaming and cheering.

It seemed that we had escaped all the way to near the usual central square. Being Sunday at early sunset, there were plenty of people there, drinking alcoholics or chatting around.

The fairies burst into that place.

"Are those fireworks?" "Some kind of event?" "Waaah, a dragon has grown from a potted

plant!" "Whoa, that's a skull walking!" "Ah, there's even lantern guys despite how it's not

Halloween." "Eeek~, a ghost is flying about~!" "Is this a dress-up party?" "This is scandalous!

This is a scandal, isn't it?" "My, it is wonderful, this has to be the doing of fairies~." "Huh? My

camera turned into a party popper?!" "Enough already, let's just have this festival!" "Hey guys,

drinks and food are on the house~!" "We came just at the right time! Guys, the food is free, he

said!" "Dammit, where did those two go~!"

Staring at the chaos in the square I nodded deeply. Yes, very good.

"Come now, let us eat."

The lunchbox had egg, ham, and chicken sandwiches that I had woken up early to prepare.

An entirely plain affair. As a result of our running around, they had broken down in part, and could not be said to look recognizably good even as flattery. But unless we ate these, today's inspections would not have ended.

How do they taste, I asked half-prankishly.

I sort of wanted to test whether he would flatter me.

Assistant-san felt a little shy as he stated his impression of the flavor. Ayup, honesty is the best policy!

Next time you should decide the course of our inspections, Assistant-san, I requested that of him and he answered that he needed to search for good spots to inspect... I was tense.

After that, ignoring the chaos around us, we nimbly deepened our reciprocal understanding.

What? Why did I not record all of our dialogue? That I will leave to the imagination of the reader, given how I proactively hid it between the lines. What Assistant-san is normally able to do I was now capable of doing as well. That was why I was gradually hiding all inconvenient things, shocking events, and embarrassing lines.



The reports that I once used to write were all that kind of thing, were they not.
Well, I would like a bit of a break about all that.

The Fairies and the Secret Tool 1

Once upon a time, in some place (Earth), humanity was flourishing. And then declined.

Ups and downs! ☆ Rises and falls! ♪

Managing Earth in the stead of humanity were the cute little fairies. I was one of those who mediated between fairies and humans.

"Well now, how come you are here?"

One day, as I was walking the woods, I met fairies. The fairies were the new humanity, and about 10 centimeters tall. And they were amazing for being just like that. Occasionally they crafted magical tools for us.

"Master human, we got something good. How about having one?"

"Good, you say. Please, go ahead."

What the fairy took out was a hat shaped like a scarab beetle.

"If you wear this, you'll be totally ignored by those around you, just like an insect."

"Convenient!"

I was captivated by its attractiveness on the spot. Wearing the insect cap I promptly headed towards the Village and attempted to infiltrate the house my friend Y lived in.

"Dieeee! You damn inseeeeeect!"

"Eeeek!"

I was assailed by my friend with a hammer in hand and a face like a demon's. She was truly intent on killing.

"It's a huge inseeeeeect!" "Yuuuuuuck!" "Kill it, tear it apart!"

Even after that, I got Hate & Pursuit Attacks from the passer-bys of where I had tried to flee towards.

"Hyahah, this here's a rare insect!" "We gotta collect it!" "We need it!"

I was chased around by ferocious kids holding bug-catching nets (damage 3x against bugs),

"BrBrBrBrBrBrBrBrBrBr!"

was pursued by an all too massive (a shuddering 10cm) beetle,

"Cluuuck cluck cluck cluck cluck!"

and at the end of all ends I nearly ended up as prey for a chicken.

It appeared that I was perceived as an insect by those around me while I was wearing the insect cap, but whether I was ignored or not depended on the person. Well, that would be true... and so I learned how normally kind people would transform when faced with an insect. That might just have been that person's true personality, perhaps. This Fairy Good was all too dangerous.

"...this one is forbidden, then."

"Whaaat..."

Today, too, humanity was definitely in decline.



The Fairies and the Secret Tool 2

Once upon a time, in some place (Earth), humanity was flourishing. And then declined.

Ups and downs! ☆ Rises and falls! ♪

Managing Earth in the stead of humanity were the cute little fairies. I was one of those who mediated between fairies and humans.

"My, you are a fairy, are you not. Good morning."

One day I met a fairy while in the woods. The fairies were the new humanity, and about 10 centimeters tall. Teensy and adorable, they really loved humans. They protected them with amazing magic.

"I understand this is sudden, but I have a request for you fairies," I said.

"What is it?"

"I have gotten lost. Please assist me."

"Whaaa..."

I had in fact gotten lost within the woods.

"Then please use this!," and the fairy took out of what seemed to be a fourth-dimensional space a convenient Tool. "It's a Hereandthere Hole!"

It was a ring the size of which would allow a person to pass through.

"A Hereandthere Hole. What sort of Tool is it?"

"It's a portable-sized wormhole that you can use to get to anywhere you like."

"How is it used?"

"Please see the manual."

I scanned the booklet I was handed.

"The Hereandthere Hole is a Tool that creates a hole in space and allows moving to wherever one likes. To use, attach it to a vertical surface such as a wall and declare a destination. If you see the area of your destination shown in the hole, then the connection was successful. Transfer time is nearly 0 seconds! Please enjoy the pleasant daily life of modern people."

All too convenient. My fondly remembered home was shown in the hole. Just head inside and it will all be fine!, but the moment I was about to toss myself in, the text in extremely tiny script appended at the end of the manual jumped to my eyes.

"※ furthermore, as the product only transmits scanned data into the destination, it only functions through a process of copy. Please be sure to painlessly delete the previous flesh and blood body after scanning."

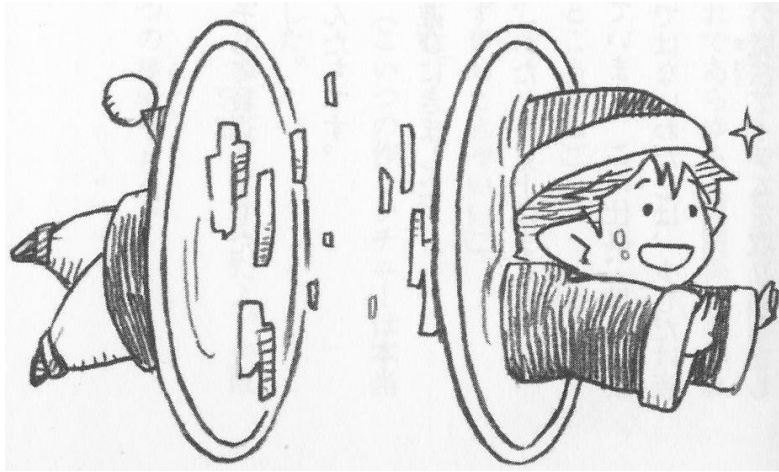
"...excuse me, does this not mean that the original body must die?"

"Well, since a completely perfect copy will live on in its stead..."

"Please hold on to this until you solve the ethical problem involved, and perfectly so."

"Again with all the hard stuff..."

Today, too, humanity was definitely in decline.



The Fairies and the Secret Tool 3

Once upon a time, in some place (Earth), humanity was flourishing. And then declined.

Ups and downs! ☆ Rises and falls! ♪

Managing Earth in the stead of humanity were the cute little fairies.

"Whew, I am tired..."

One fairy came to visit as I was racking my brains about something.

"Master human, are you worried about something?"

The 10cm tall fairy hopped on top of the desk and looked up at me.

"Truth is, dealing with fellow humans has me a little tired of late..."

My job was that of Mediator, handling matters between fairies and humans. The job also entailed consultations with matters of the Village, however, to me, who was not exactly at home with dealing with people, it all felt a little bit tiresome.

"At times like these, have one of this," and the fairy took out one of their amazing magical items. "Translation field!"

At a glance it was like food, a jelly in the shape of a cup.

"Eat this and whatever the person you're talking to really means with their words will be translated for you."

"That would be wonderful!"

People said whatever they did not mean as easily as they breathed. They very easily say "*I hate lies! (is actually a lie)*". And now, a jelly could turn their words into what they really meant. It would be natural that I felt that every possible human relationship problem could be solved with this. Woooah.

I promptly wolfed down the jelly and rushed into the Village.

"Good morning, another pretty day, is it (bah, it gets 70 points at most)."

That veeery nice old lady was thinking something unbelievable.

"Bwah, milady. You're looking mighty fine today, too (women are to be praised no matter what)."

A farmer who provided me with all sorts of things was quite impolite.

"Oi, I'll have hot cakes for dinner today. Thanks for all your work today (it's only because the stew she makes is actually awful)."

What the grandfather thought of her cute granddaughter was not good.

"Yo. That cabbage sandwich you got me the other day was so bad I could die. That there was a failed experiment (the cabbage sandwich was so bad I could die)."

Only my worst friend Y was all-in with what she really meant, which struck me.

Crying, I went to submit a complaint to the fairy.

"...excuse me, but when I ate the Translation Field, well, relationships with other humans became even more suffocating, you know?"

"So it's another forbidden Tool?"

Today, too, humanity was definitely in decline.



Supply, Demand, and Something Else
Concerning Three Villages



Using my vacation days, I left to travel.

I walked the streets with clothes easy to move in, shoes easy to walk in, and a suitcase with rollers attached packed with food and spare clothes.

These hills of Summer that stretched off in the distance had their grass caressed by the wind, creating and then leaving behind a faint wave. It was a scene to behold.

A small person about 10cm in size showed its face from the back of my hair.

"I'm coming too!"

It was a fairy.

They were quite small, but they were rightly humanity.

"I have a very sharp premonition of fun," the fairy said after moving to my shoulder.

They were very sensitive to things that were fun, and even better, they really loved humans.

If they felt *fun*, that proved human habitation was nearby.

"A human settlement could provide us with sweets, perhaps."

Schlp, drool dangled from the fairy's lips.

As we walked a little further, we found that the grassy area led to a street, with ancient ruins visible in bits and pieces.

Only a few of these ancient buildings remained as they had been. Some had been swallowed by the woods, some had been lost in natural disasters, some something else, the near totality remained behind in ruins.

But, very rarely, there was one of them that had remained behind as it used to be.

One of them towered before me like a castle.

Once, they were called *an apartment building of flats*.

That people lived there was clear from how there was laundry hung out to dry on the rooftop that the eyes could barely reach.

With all around it being completely in ruins, it appeared that only here was suitable for habitation.

As the red wall had been built with bricks of slightly different colors that made it look like a mosaic, I could spot quite a sense of modern tastes.

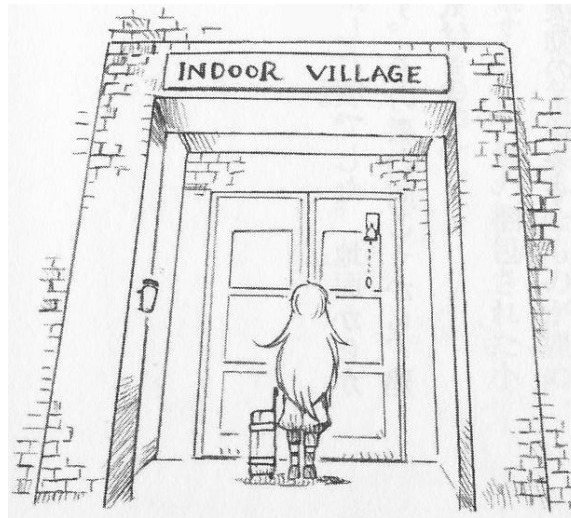
"It does appear people live in it, but I just cannot get the sense than they do, you see."

"Do you?"

"I feel something of a stifling air, like they're holed up in there!"

Finding the front entrance I saw there was a plaque that read as follows:

–Indoor Village.



A question mark danced wildly within my brain.

"A village... but indoors?"

My questions knew no end, but it appeared to be no mistake that this was a village in which people dwelt.

At this point in time, families came in all sorts and shapes.

I tried ringing the brass doorbell that hung on these double doors that opened in the middle.

The doors remained shut.

I tried ringing again. A bit louder this time.

The doors remained shut.

Third try, this time I tugged the bell as loud as I could.

The doors remained shut.

"HELLOOOOOOOO!"

My voice had become a little irritated, there was no helping that.

"I am a traveleer!"

No matter how hard I shouted, there was no sign that the door would open.

The mood was that of a held breath.

"Cannot be that they are wary against foreigners?"

"Maybe they're shy!"

"A shy village..."

My eyes stared in the distance. Well done surviving, if so.

What to do, give up this sidetrack and return to my travels... but as I thought of that, it happened. A faint vibration reached me from the floor. Woods spread in the Western direction. And that was when I first noticed that tracks were laid down that led all the way from the depth of the woods to me.

"Dear me, a railway. A fully functional, rare one at that..."

On it there drove an antique, pulling a cargo carriage. It was the source of the vibration.

The train ran the tracks at low speed and came to a halt right before our eyes.

A middle-aged man wearing a stripe-patterned shirt came down from the driver's seat.

Refreshingly, he seemed one of those older men who liked people. He was well tanned from the sun, and had quite the physique to him. The polo shirt with blue and white stripes suited him well.

Next, the man sharply wore back his hat and rushed over to the front of the gate at the pace

of a jog, one that felt like it was following company regulations.

"Excuse me, but may I be here?"

"Ah, of course. Go on."

The striped man gave me a bow right after having briskly moved over, rang the doorbell, and said this with a voice that carried well.

"I have arrived with the deliveries!"

The door opened with force.

However, there was no sign of people past the door.

"Wait, is this uninhabited?"

"This is an automatic door," said the striped man while continuing his jog.

Ahead of the door there extended a short entrance hall. The walls were covered with countless nameplates, specifying their names and room numbers. Each nameplate was also fitted with something of a home delivery box. The striped man briskly walked back to the train and picked up a large bundle of smaller packages. Checking the slips, he tossed each into their appropriate boxes.

"Does this mean this is the village?"

"It does. This building is one whole village."

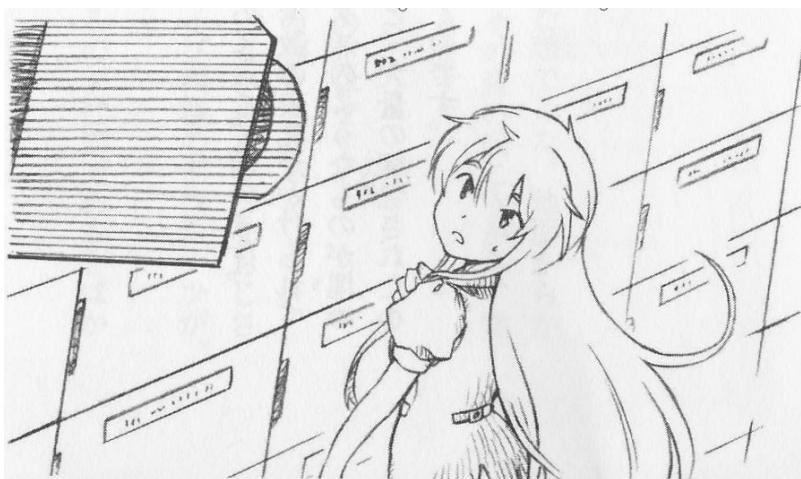
"Nice and compact, is it... huh?"

I noticed it. There was a mysterious gaze staring at me.

The source of the gaze was located near the ceiling.

"...there is a camera."

I had discovered a surveillance camera.



"Not a nice thing to peep with that."

"Apologies... there are reasons why we must do this."

The camera replied by itself, which made me shudder in surprise.

"Well, again apologies, but, are you a traveler?"

"Y-, yes I am."

"Ahhh, uhm, if you would like, you can have some tea?"

That was rare. I heard the striped man whisper that behind me.

Led indoors I found that there was a wide lobby with a sofa set for visitors. On top of a white and clean table there was, readied, a tea cup with a sweets box wrapped in plain paper.

That said, however, I could not see any people.

"Cookies!" and the fairy alighted on the table and embraced the box.

For now I decided to sit down on the provided chair. Steam was rising from the tea before me.

"Do I just drink this?"

"Can we just have our meal?"

"Of course, go on, go on."

There was a tiny speaker set on the table.

"Are you the one from the camera?"

"Yes, I am the representative of the residents. I apologize for having to be like this. There is a reason why we must do this..."

The box of cookies was squirming, so the fairy must have already sneaked inside.



"And so, how may I assist you?"

"...truth is, we don't really need assistance."

"Huh?"

"By the way, what is that creature? I can't really see it from this angle, is it a squirrel or something?"

"It is a fairy."

"You're kidding me."

"It is true."

"Me, it's the first time seeing a fairy," went the female voice with excitement in its tone.

"Awww, I want to talk about so much. I want to ask so much!"

"If it is talk you want, neither of us mind, you know?"

"Thank you very much! It's been a year since I last spoke to someone outside, I feel tense."

I was at a loss for words.

"W-, why would that be?"

"That's because I never go out of my room. The people of this village traditionally don't go outside and find talking directly with people to be difficult."

"Amazing how that became a tradition."

"Happily, sewage handling is excellent, and we are able to use a little bit of electricity. What we need, to say it, is a little clothing and food as well as medical supplies. Those kinds of items we can receive while staying here via the home delivery boxes set in the outer room."

"There is absolutely no lie in what the sign outside says, then."

However, even that elicited questions.

"How do you people get your items supplied without moving at all?"

"About that, well, so long as our village fulfills a specific duty, then they are all sent to us for free."

"A duty?"

"...that would be to read books and write our reviews of them."

I blinked several times.

"Books, what kind?"

"Those that are sent together with the materials... that's right, how about having a look at the catalog?"

I had a spare catalog shown to me in the lobby.

The catalog showed food, clothes, living necessities, entertainment products, and many more.

It was lavish with photographs, a luxury in this age.

"This catalog is sent once per month to all residents."

"I see. With this, each of you can order what they want."

As may be obvious, every product was free.

There was a book category in the catalog, and that made for its own mini-catalog. There was a variety of genres, from mystery to fairy-tales to essays.

"Books are much more represented in this rather than the necessities, I see."

"That's because they're our duty."

They obtained food and clothes just by avidly reading books.

This was the perfect village. I wanted to move in.

"Where is this delivered from?"

"A normal village."

"You are not exchanging much, are you?"

"We aren't. We don't know the reason, but this has been going on for a very long time. We don't know what sort of people reside there, but it has to be a village of good people."

Certainly, maintaining one whole village meant they were not half-hearted about this.

But was something this easy even really possible?

"Thanks to them, even we, who can't hunt nor farm, can live a peaceful daily life."

"Hunting aside, you do not even have farming skills?"

"We don't. Because of our fear of strangers, all group activities are impossible."

"....."

"Even jobs that involve the whole village we do in turns, a system that allows us to do them without meeting each other face-to-face."

What a community this was.

"...if you dislike people that much, then it is noticeable how you went out of your way to talk to me."

"What are you talking about, voice chat is different."

"Voice chat?"

"We aren't good at conversing with people, but we love conversing across a mike!"

A tone which said she was not feeling the slightest contradiction in what she said.

"And so, please, do feel welcome to stop here for the night. We're going to prepare a room and food for you, free of charge."

"Well then, of course."

It was the proposal I sort of wished for, and it sort of came true.

"And on that, can you give us five minutes each?"

"Hm? Five minutes?"

"Yes, it came from a discussion a few minutes ago. Every resident wants to share feelings with people-lovers. Nearly all of us wish to have a fun voice chat with you."

"...if I may abruptly change the subject, how many people are there in this village?"

"One hundred."

"Ow."

Being a people-lover... what a heavy burden.

I was made to talk with people until the dead of night.

"I am... so tired..."

I collapsed face down on top of brand-new bedsheets.

I felt like mud, tired from my travels and from the work of the mind on top of it.

The people of this village did not leave their rooms no matter the day, yet, mysteriously, despite being afraid of others they still had a longing for companionship. As they were strongly fixated with talking across microphones, which they called 'voice chatting', it appeared that, whenever someone from outside came by, they were jumping over each other in order to keep company with these travelers until their voices grew hoarse.

For all that, it sure was some past-time to pretend they were not home to the average person.

"Wanna get some relief for the tiredness?"

The fairy jutted out his head from my hair.

"Depends on how."

The fairy took out a syringe.

"I can give you a magical medicine, want a jab?"

"Fixing tiredness with a jab is not acceptable."

I said that while still facing down.



"I see..."

The fairy seemed dejected as he dumped the syringe in a vinyl bag with 'general garbage' written on it in large letters.

The room I was given was certainly something, as expectable from a former high-level multifamily condo.

The furniture looked high quality, the sheets were new, the carpet fluffy.

It did not appear that the people of the village were indolent, despite their fear of strangers, and the cleaning was also thorough, beating for comfort all the hotels I had slept in thus far on my travels.

"Dinner, too... it was very good..."

Perhaps a cook of incredible skill was among these indoor people, because the dinner that a robot had carried in while we were having our relay chat tasted wonderful.

So why? It all felt pointless...

"If you would like, could you stop here another day?"

"N-, no, sorry, I know, since I am here and all that, but I need to hurry onwards, so..."

I declined a passionate invitation to stay with a strained face.

"But we still haven't introduced you to our famous tourist spots..."

"There are famous tourist spots here?"

"Indeed, our Indoor Village has plenty of tourist spots."

"For example, what?," I asked while restraining my curiosity.

"The very first thing is of course the rooftop! The view is incredible. After that, the underground boiler room. It's popular with ruins maniacs. And then the corridors! They are long and strolling them feels just wonderful. And then, after having your fill with tourism, at night we can voice chat again, how about?"

"Well, sure... but no, I believe I must continue my travels."

"I see, that's sad... well, regardless, please drop by the nearby villages. Those are also good spots to visit."

"Is one among them the village which sends you material?"

I honestly had quite the interest in that village.

Given they had enough material to maintain a whole village, they should be able to freely offer me anything.

I felt a little bit of excitement. There was no harm in forming good relations here.

"There's two other villages in this land. One is the Jungle Village, which sends us supplies, the other is the Cargo Village which manages the railway."

"What, that railway also has a village?"

"It does. If you would like, you could ride it, you know ? We can arrange for that."

"Please do!"

"Yah, so it was you who applied to be a passenger."

The striped man from before alighted from the train that had come by.

The people of the Indoor Village had handled all the procedures required for me to ride the train.

"I thank you very much for all that you are doing for me on this day."

"This train has only three stops. From here, the Indoor Village, to our Cargo Village and then the end of the line at the Jungle Village. Which of the two would you like to go to?"

"Well, may I have you drop me by each of them in sequence?"

"Meaning you want to drop by Cargo Village?"

"Is that forbidden?"

"No, it's not that. It's just, it's very rare and I was surprised. Come now, sit on whatever seat you like. If you aren't used to trains, I recommend a window seat."

"Thank you. I will take one as you recommend."

And so I became a train passenger.

The train took power from solar panels installed on the roof.

"This is quite the fast railway line for being solar powered."

"Yeah, it is. Transport efficiency is better when compared to the caravan, see. We can carry materials quickly, precisely, and carefully."

The train smoothly departed, and since it barely even shook I felt no travel sickness, it was a very pleasant voyage.

The fairy, too, was in Nap Mode using the luggage net in the stead of a hammock.

"By the way, what is in that package you received from the Indoor Village?"

While on the car, I asked that to the striped driver.

The man had taken a bundle of paper from a mailbox separate from the home delivery boxes, which had me curious.

"They're their reviews of the books and the orders for the next supply trip. That's the volume you get when a hundred people post that every week."

"Those would be the book reviews that have been made into their duty, I see."

"Exactly. This is a custom that has been going on for decades. Write reviews, get products in exchange. That's the circulation that's been going on. It's thanks to the Jungle Village that we're all alive."

A ride of about 30 minutes had us stop at the Cargo Village station.

Cargo Village was a land that had a facility that used to be a train station at its center. The building had had repairs done to it several times and was not the same as it was originally, but station facility, tracks, and trains were all in working order.

Population was about 80. It seemed they were farmers, besides a little livestock. However, what was amazing about this village was, of all things, how energetic the residents were about their work.

On that, there were no people idly walking by.

From young people to old people, all of them were going at their job at a brisk pace.

And all of them were well tanned by the sun and had a burly, muscular build to them.

This was the kind of people who would be able to distribute the packages entrusted to them, that much was certain.

"The physical strength is just overflowing in this village, is it not, mister fairy?"

"Physical strength is amazing!"

"Howdy, I'm happy we have a guest. I'm the leader of this village. Though they customarily call me station chief."

I was waiting in a room within the train station when the elderly station chief and his wife came in at a jog.

"Thank you very much for all you have done for me."

The two of them were of course dressed in stripes.

"Are you wondering about our clothes? This is something like our distinguishing clothing, so... these were the legendary vestments of those in the transport business as handed down from a distant country far in the past," explained the station chief.

"I do not quite understand why, but it is a very refreshing design, I believe."

"We could provide you with one, if you would like?"

"Are you sure you can just give me something like that?"

"Yes. That said, wearing this means you will have to briskly run through any length of space further than three steps from you."

"What...?"

"That's the tradition. Inexplicably, those who wear these clothes are unable to avoid doing that," the man's wife added.

"But that's a wonderful thing, you see. By moving briskly you will be able to live quickly, precisely, and carefully."

"Then I will politely refuse."

"Following that motto has allowed us to live through the harsher ages," said the station chief with faraway eyes. "It's said that, far in the past, people in the transport business all stood close together. However, those were all nasty businessmen who didn't even see their customers as customers. They always did whatever they wanted, were late on the delivery dates, damaged the packages, and ignored delivery schedules."

The station chief's words made the wife, terrified, hug herself.

"Huh. So there were dark times, then..."

Certainly, if I were delivered a letter that was all crumpled up, I would also feel bad.

"However, at some point, a legendary deliveryman came from another country, and that's how we managed to survive through those times."

"Was that a delivery driver?"

"He rode his own vehicle, delivered packages, and even accepted cargo delivery requests, that's why he was called like that."

"To speak bluntly we were a wreck of a village, under decline for a long time, but happily we were able to continue working thanks to the neighboring Jungle Village."

"Is this village also blessed by the contributions of the Jungle Village?"

"Yes, exactly," and the wife chuckled sharply. "Just through the costs of making periodic deliveries from the Jungle Village to the Indoor Village we make more than enough."

"Now, what sort of village is this Jungle Village, I am wondering."

"I've dropped by a time or two. It's a very pleasant village," went the station chief. "The facilities, the state of their food, their generosity... well, I suppose there's nothing to be said except that that village is an earthly Eden."

"A-, an earthly Eden... that is how you describe it..."

"Gauguin!"

My whisper was answered by the fairy with an onomatopoeia that I did not understand. This Jungle Village, overflowing with virtue and goods as it was, and described as an earthly Eden, suddenly drew my interest.

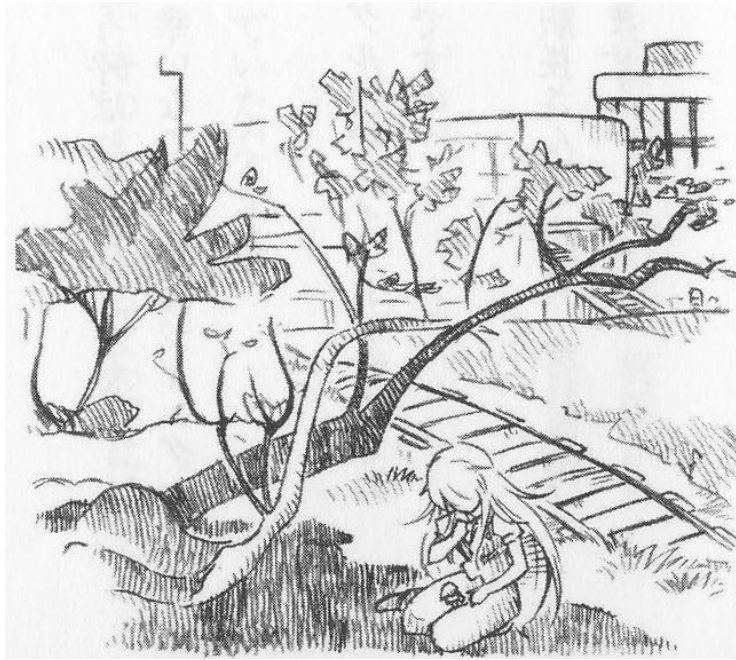
With that all being said, I visited the third human dwelling, the Jungle Village.

The land matched the rumors.

There were many people, facilities were set up, and it was in general a prosperous land.

Preserving the functions of a former city now buried in luxuriously growing woods was the trick to maintaining civilization.

Here we had moving stairs, handy robots, high-level farming technologies, and a café-terrace that anybody could get food from for free.



I approached said café-terrace and found a middle-aged man, one that appeared to be the owner, tapping on a small terminal's keyboard with a harsh face.

"I have heard that this café gives out food free of charge, is that true?"

The man suddenly lifted his face and clicked his tongue.

"...the hell are you?"

"I am a traveler. I went through Indoor Village and Cargo Village, and just arrived here not long ago."

I answered that more or less bewildered and,

"...uh-huh. Then, what? Wanna have some cake?"

He felt hard to deal with. But what I had to say I said.

"Yes. If possible."

"Brazen, are we. Well, that's fine. Sit wherever you like. I'll bring some right away. Awww-aw, had to have someone bother me just as things were getting good."

Dripping with discontent, the owner put on a kettle.

"...this is entirely different from what I heard. It feels wrong."

"Shall we make our escape?"

I was having a whispered conversation with the fairy when the owner brought me tea and chocolate cake.

"There, what you ordered. I chose the cake at random. Well, they're all good, so you shouldn't have complaints."

His arrogant attitude had me knitting my eyebrows, but that mood was blown away the instant I saw the cake.

"What a rarity! Chocolate cake, unbelievable!"

"Huh. It's because in this our Jungle Village we fuse the ancient technologies with the harvest of the woods, so we have unlimited food production capabilities. Way different from the stingy Cargo Village and the big-headed Indoor Village."

Hearing those words I felt depressed, so I dived into eating the cake.

It tasted marvelously.

"Yes, this is quite delicious. A chocolate cake that is just slightly damp and sticks to your tongue is just the best!"

"An expectable conclusion. Our cake machine is the best there is."

Having tasted something so delicious I could ignore the little bit of attitude I had gotten.

"Speaking as a Mediator who has been to a variety of places, this is a city with a fairly high quality of production. I am surprised."

"Right. You kind of get it, do you," and the words from my heart seemed to improve the owner's spirits. "All right, then, I'll give you unlimited refills. Special service just for today." 30 minutes later...

We were in a living Eden.

"I'm extra stuffed..."

The fairy, who had eaten more cake than the size of his body, Rounded Up like an overinflated balloon and rolled to the floor.



Although I did not change in silhouette, I actually felt something similar.

It felt like we had eaten one whole cake each. I was confident that, if I ate anymore, I would spew it out.

"Dear mister owner, this is the best of all villages."

"Is that... five stars?"

"Huh?"

"The review, I mean. Full score is a five star evaluation."

"If you mean that the more stars the higher the evaluation... that is true, I believe you are close to full score."

The owner grinned while chomping on a cigar.

"Heh heh heh, I see. Five stars, I see. Then we're good."

"I had mispercieved. This village is full of kind people like you, mister owner. That's why you support other villages with material goods without asking for anything in return."

"...huh? It's not like we give up stuff just for free. We bless that garbage village with goods because we make a profit."

The harsh words froze my smile.

"A... profit?"

"Of course. We don't mind handing over a thing or two, but to come out with materials in volume means we gotta have an appropriate compensation. That's natural."

"And what is the compensation?"

"Reviews, lady, reviews. Five stars."

I could not understand in the slightest. Since that was the face I was making, the owner went, "damn beginners, what'd you gotta do with them," and sat down hard on the seat in front of mine.

"...now listen here. Our way of life knows no discomfort, but once the fears of living disappears from humanity, up next there appear higher appetites. If you can't pay for food then you become frantic in searching for it, but what comes after a full belly is where to sleep. And once you find out where to sleep, next it's time to make a family. With them around the scale of requirements increases, and at the end this desire comes out. The desire of being accepted by others."

"The so-called need for recognition, is it."

"That's right. Everybody wants to be acknowledged as superior. That's how far they want to be different from those who until then had been their peers. They want them to yield. And for that, there's evaluation. Ones with good 'valuation, well, they are better. Two stars better than one star, four stars better than three stars, and nothing less of the best gets five stars."

"I see."

"Well, there was the problem of which way we'd find evaluation, since personal appearance and power wielded in this village had no point. Everyone is rich in this village, everyone can read and write, everybody can dress as well as they like. Personality is only what one states, but everybody, just everybody's garbage, including me. In a situation like that, it's impossible to measure real strengths... and impartially, too, so one's tastes, good and bad, are what says what you are. Understanding so far?"

"All too terribly."

The *"everybody, just everybody's garbage, including me"* line was particularly impressive.

"That's why everybody, just everybody in this village is more or less a writer. That's because writing's the best for judging one's tastes, good and bad."

"Huh-uh. So that is why there was a massive volume of books present in the Indoor Village."

"Why, you got a good head on your shoulders. It's proof you got good tastes. Heh heh, and you gave me five stars. This means people gotta surrender to me."

"...s-, surrender?"

"That's what it means."

"I see..."

"That's why we never ever give evaluations to what we each write. Well, no need to evaluate it, it's all trash. All that they write is trash, you see..."

"They?"

"The people of this village. When it comes to them, everyone, just everyone is an intolerable jerk. No need to repeat myself, they got bad personalities, but on top of that, even their tastes are terrible! What you'd call garbage, right. For example, the owner of the bar on block two. The novels written by that stupid old man are all sordid love triangles! It's not fun at all to read that stuff, it only makes you feel bad!"

He was really mad.

"There is one thing I do not understand... where do love triangles fit, exactly?"

"In his novels, obviously! That old bastard's novels are always love triangles written like whirlpools of love! Always the same, like it's the only thing that monkey has learned to do! Worse, that crap always gets five stars from the people of Indoor Village! I'd only give one star to that sort of novels if I were them!"

It appears we have a most magnificent ill will towards the styles of other authors.

"I do have a question."

"Go on."

"What kind of novels do you write?"

"I write about pure love! Pure and beautiful love affairs between young men and women expressed with an abundance of bittersweetness... this is True Human Drama, you see! Khaff!"

The owner coughed.

"And it isn't just the old fart at the bar. Everybody, just everybody at this village is off their rocker. The abnormality of their brains is transparently obvious! Like the general store on block four! That guy writes war novels, you know? Writing about brutal stuff like that, with no love relationships in sight, it's proof that his heart is a wreck!"

"Huh..."

"Guy in block seven writes about giant monsters destroying towns, the old bag in block one about a haughty queen living interesting lives with one man after another. All crap. Those people have garbage oozing from their brains. Damn them all!"

The owner slammed the table firmly.

"I'm gonna make them surrender... with my novels! I'm gonna get highly praising reviews and five stars and show them the distance they have to go to reach me! I jus' gotta do that, I jus' gotta keep writing new novels! Bah, this isn't the time to keep you company! Sorry, but I gotta have you let me return to writing. Drink all the tea you like! I'm busy! Speed is also important in the art of writing, understand! I gotta publish a new work on the double, have it carried by Cargo Village on the dot and get five stars from Indoor Village!"

The owner resolutely returned to the counter and resolutely resumed typing on the small terminal.

"...we should go." "Ugggh!"

I picked up the fairy that had become round and left the café.

"So how was Jungle Village?"

The next day I boarded the return train and had the striped man ask me that with a smile.

"...how should I put it..."

"They were annoying, right?"

My eyes were wide as I stared at the striped man.

"...so you knew."

"Of course. That's because I interact with those people on a daily basis. That's how I also know about how to deal with a bad mood."

"How do you?"

"You should rack them over the coals in your reviews. That's what hurts those people the most."

"Bwah. That makes me feel sort of sad for them."

"What, but those that write should naturally be able to accept an ordeal like that. To tell the truth, occasionally our village secretly makes alterations. Whatever else, fanning up their fires increases their writing speed and makes the circulation cycle speed up, which makes us

richer. How about that? Will you be a bit cruel to improve your mood?"

"Welll, ahahahah... but you know? No, I will not..."

"Heh heh heh, I see. Hahahahah!"

I decided to have him carry me to Indoor Village so that I could resume my journey from there.

"Now then, before you leave..."

I decided to write a report, so I opened my notebook.

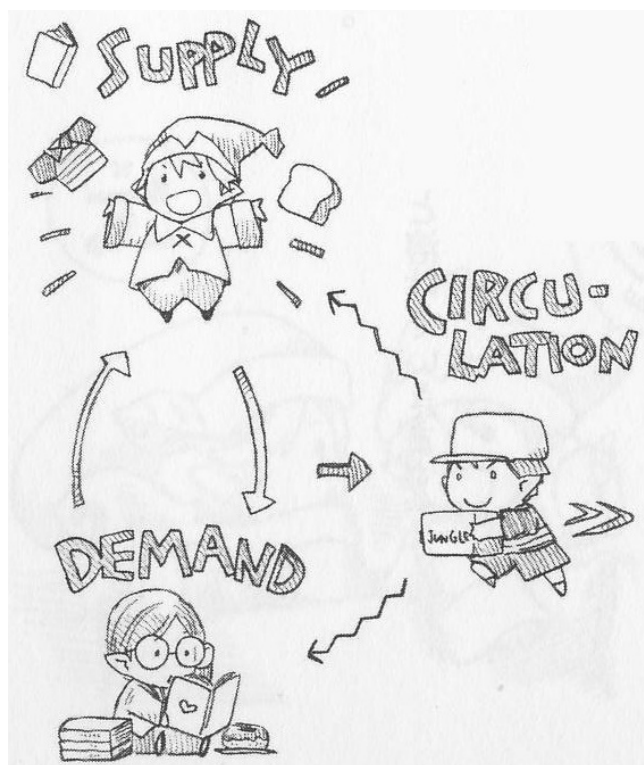
This memo I write will, when the day comes that my travels are finished, become source material for *The Human Habitation Guidebook*.

"Master human, master human?," the fairy asked me this. "Which village was the best?"

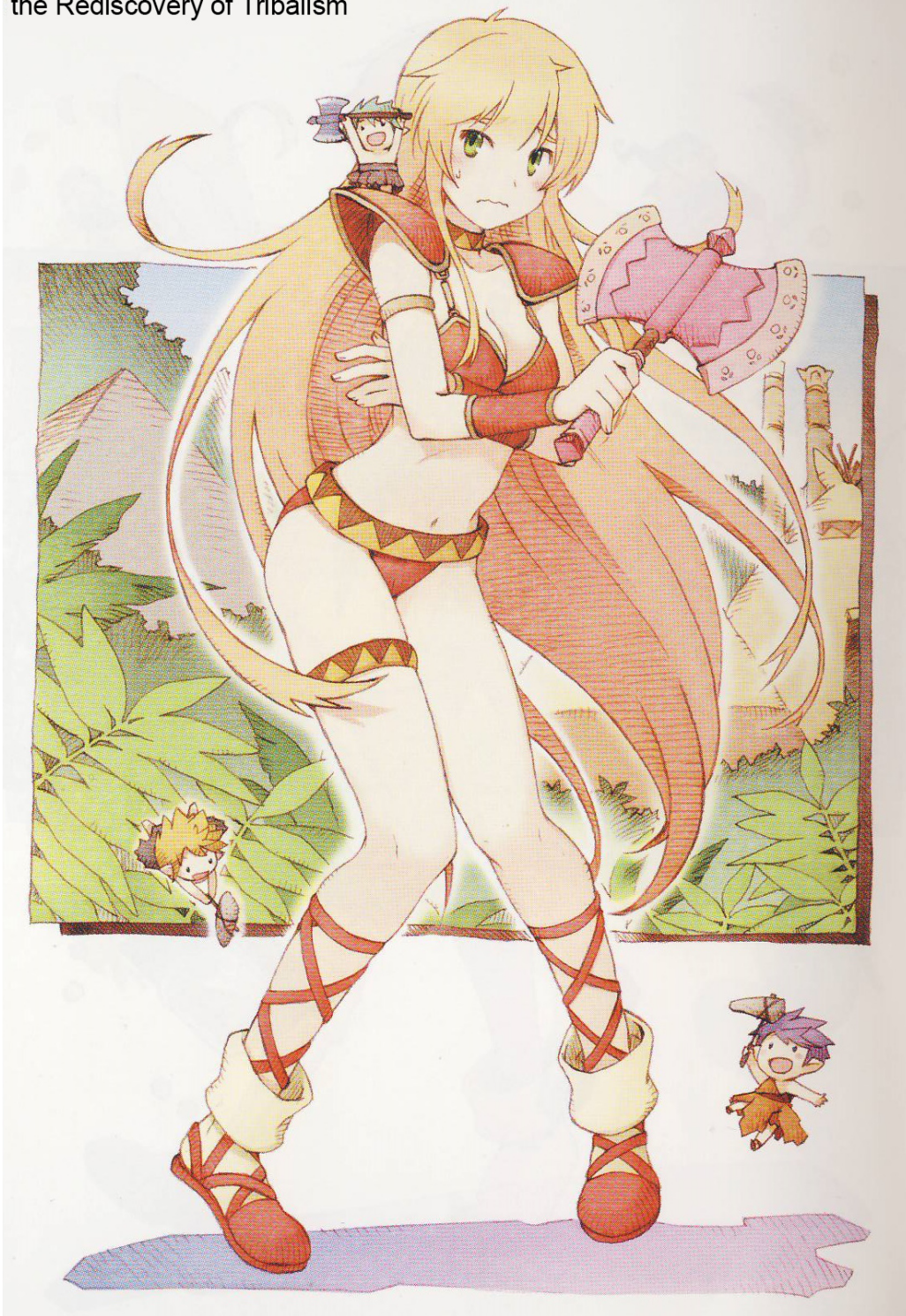
I let out a hmmm.

"Jungle Village felt like the MVP, but truth is that the pure consumption of Indoor Village is indispensable, and furthermore the Cargo Village had influence that could not be seen... well, this is a difficult one."

No matter how hard I thought, no answer to that question came to me.



An Uncomfortable Truth Regarding
the Rediscovery of Tribalism



There was a field of flowers that bloomed in all colors, the very picture of a fairy-tale. The carpet of flowers covered the land until it eventually melted into deeply green woods and city ruins.

"We have a problem."

I was at a loss for where to go within that picturesque scene.

"What happened, princess?"

The attendant fairy jutted his head out from my pocket.

"Have a look."

I slid the ancient map I had in hand before the fairy's face. After staring fixedly at the map, the fairy shifted his gaze to the land before him, lastly lifting his face.

"...what should be there sort of isn't...?"

"Exactly so!"

I raised my voice in desperation on a hill with not a soul in sight.

I had decided to follow the map, reach the old road, and continue my travels, but the path had long since broken off, covered and concealed by flowers.

"If we continue without a map it is likely we will quickly find ourselves lost."

"What about an adventure, once in a while?"

"This is traveling, it is not an adventure. Sigh, what do I do..."

Powerless I stood stock still, and a second fairy (they had randomly increase in number) jutted his head out of my pocket.

"Found iiiiit!"

"What did you find?"

"A full-out presentment of fun made me all sensitive?"

Generally, fairies were able to sensitively infer fun.

In other words, something was happening inside the woods.

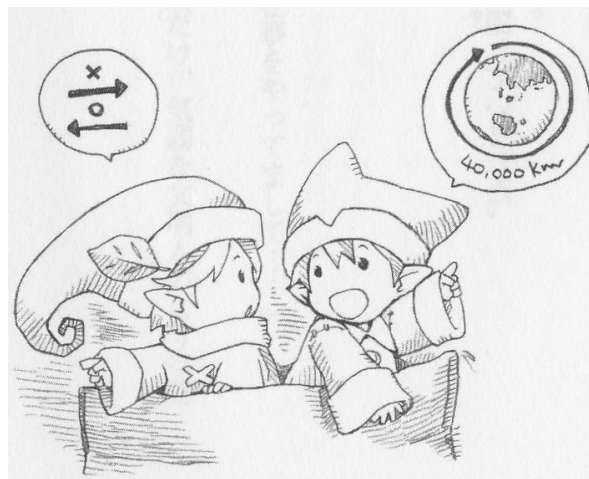
"How distant would it be?"

"About forty thousand kilometers?"

"Hyh?!"

"That's in the opposite direction!" "Ahhh, right!"

"...ah, that is what you meant..."



Several seconds later I realized that that was the circumference of the Earth.

If the opposite direction was the circumference of the Earth, then the human habitation had to be right under our noses.

Fun or not aside, if there was a human dwelling then I wanted to visit it.

"Do we go?" "Do we go-way?"

"We should go," and that was what it came to.

A village laid hidden ahead of where the road ended, inside woods of oak and beech.

Near the entrance stood a pillar with *Forgotten Village* engraved on it.

"Quite the name for it, is it not."

In the central square freed from trees there were decorative tents set up in orderly fashion.

I promptly spotted the first villager, but...

"Talking?" "Taaa-lking?"

"Ngh... you want me to talk? To talk to that person?"

It was a big and burly man. He had just a pelt of fur surrounding his hips, and an axe dangled from his waist. He said, and with all his self, that he had muscles and thus did not need clothes. Did he also think that he had no need for love of humanity so long as he had muscles?

Unease I did have, but I felt that I had to do my best and talk.

"Uhm... excuse me?"

"WOOOOAH!," Mr. Big Man replied with a shout.

"Eeeek?!" "Piii?!" "Piii?!"

The two fairies instantly concealed themselves.

Since I could not do something that nimble, I stood fixed like a plank.

"Huh? What be you? Who be you? A foreigner?"

"Uhm... I would be a traveler, so..."

"What be traveler? It tasty?"

The barbarian-styled man leaned forwards.

"I-, I am not good-tasting... maybe."

"That be not the truth! You be looking really tasty!"

"Uhm, please calm yourself. I work as Mediator for the United Nations..."

"Huh? A United Nations Mediator?"

The barbarian lifted his body upright on the spot. For some reason, just for that one instant he had the demeanor of someone from a more brittle civilization.

"Me not really get what you're talking about. Me believe you must meet our patriarch!"

He said that with a docile face.

"We have lived over 500 years in these woods."

Led by the big man I met face to face with the patriarch inside one very colorful tent.

"500 years! Is that true?"

"Girl, you be doubting ME?!"

The old but macho patriarch gripped firmly the axe he had near him.

"I am not 'doubting' at all, that would be out of the question! I believe you entirely."

I faced that preposterous threat with appeasement.

"Then that be fine, girl."

The patriarch's hand left the axe. However, I was not in the slightest bit relieved. Many more axes decorated the inside of the tent.

"Bothered by the axes you be, I see."

"Huh, no, I believe it a marvelous collection."

"Axes be the soul of a warrior. Have a good axe, be proud as a warrior. Me happen to collect them."

...it was similar to Grandfather's gun hobby, that.

"On that I have a question, if I may know why you live like this in the depths of the woods?"

I blurted that out since this was a fairly primitive way of living.

For some reason even with this simple standard of civilization people seemingly lived with no particular problems, given how the faces of those I passed past were relaxed and their complexions slick.

"Mh-HM! The old world became really problematic due to a war between old gods. It was dangerous, so our ancestors fled to the woods."

"What, how long ago was that?"

"As I said, five hundred years ago."

"And who were the gods?"

"The five Great Gods. Even among them, Goddess Mother Earth and the Goddess of the Dark were the most troublesome. Under them, the shapes of mountains changed and continents sank."

"Uhm, you do know that the realism of that myth would improve if you set it at least five thousand years ago?"

The patriarch's eyes flared open and he gripped an axe.

"GIRL! Be you doubting our TRADITIONS!"

"Not at all, out of the question I would!," and I decided to go back to the prior conversation.

"So you took refuge in the woods in order to flee the fight between the gods, and you settled down here, is that correct?"

"Exactly so. We have always been isolated! Until recently, we be not even knowing that there be people outside."

That said, this place was barely a ten minute walk from the entrance of the woods, really.

"We be knowing little of what lies outside here."

"So I see."

"And because of that, we be welcoming you, outside person! You may visit our town! We be even having a hotel ready."

"So you have hotels here?"

"Our clan's hotels are tents. Have you problems with tents?"

"No, none whatsoever. Thank you very much, mister patriarch."

That hotel was in the center of the village.

It was a peculiarly large tent, with cloth complexly wound around a large tree's trunk, which was used as pillar, creating a number of single rooms, corridors, and halls.

"Dear guest, I be keeping your magic item."

The middle-aged man at the reception requested me that.

"The magic item, you say, what do you mean?"

The man pointed at the binoculars I hung around my neck.

"This is just a machine, it is not a cursed item, you know?"

"Cursed items be bringing misfortune upon people. They be forbidden in this village."

That was how things seem to have gotten. But that only felt like a village in decline had come to forbid the technologies of past times.

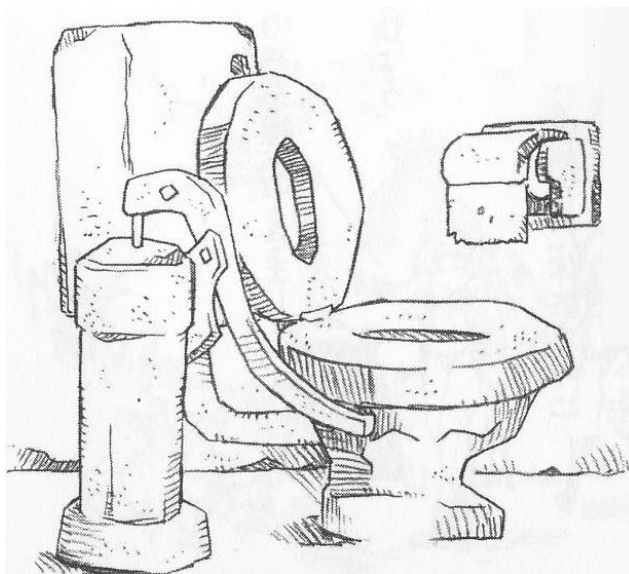
Since he said that they would be returned once I left the village, I decided to obey and left

them with him.

The room he led me to after that was, incredibly, larger than my room back at my own house. "Unbelievable..."

The flooring was in mock-wooden planks, the wall-cloth a calming color scheme, and the wooden furniture simple yet excellent in quality. It was also complete with amenities such as slippers and toothbrush made with leaves and branches.

As small window there was a section of the tent taken out, which had an anti-insect net stretched through, and it even had lace-like curtains made of a woven fiber of old leaves. The stone toilet had a roll of toilet papyrus in its own holder.



Similarly, the bathroom and the shower it included had usable hot water via a boiler.

"Were they not... bar... barians?"

I went back while whispering that and found that the fairies, who had vanished on top of the bed, had returned.

"This is a fantastic room!" "To the point it's unnatural!"

"It will not do to be bothered by this."

The fairies were exploring about the room and came back holding axes just their sizes.

"We got tiny axes!" "For use by us?"

They were of course miniature axes for shaving, supplied as amenities.

"Be you all right, miss guest?"

A young lady showed her head at the hanged curtain used in the stead of door.

The lady was quite tall and quite sexy. She was wearing a bikini armor on her just-matured body, and as ever there was an axe dangling from her hips. She was the exact opposite type as I, a beautiful woman overflowing with vital force while at the same time having quite the brawn to her.

"I be warrioress. Name be She-Who-Dances-With-Wolves."

"That is an odd name."

"Those here be all like this. More importantly, me was told to show you around. Me show you anywhere you like. Also, me take any requests for advice as fellow women."

"So you are my guide. Us strangers truly bring a burden on you, I see."

Dances-with-Wolves (hereafter the warrioress) composedly shook her head.
"We be treating strangers well here. No be worried."
But that said, for just an instant her face was crossed by sadness.

It seemed that this hotel gave morning and evening meals as board. I was surprised at how good the service was given how much in decline the rest was. As there was still some time before dinner, I had the warrioress show me around the village.



"Here be residential ward," she said.
"There are so many tents, I see."
"Here be warrior training ground."
"It appears everyone is really enthusiastic about it."
"Here be watering place."
"So you gather water via gutters fixed to branches. Huh."
I was given the digest version.

As a conclusion, this village was well prepared for being hidden.

Even as far as facial expressions, everyone had this vague relaxedness to them, like they were just enjoying life. Speaking from experience, villages where the food situation was good would frequently have a mood like this to them.

I spoke about that and,

"Food, Forgotten Village be having no problems with it. Have superlative hunting pack."

"Huuuh. So you are based around hunting-gathering, I see."

"Indeed. Often have meat and river fishes."

"Now that you say it, I am hungry."

"Then we go to place where food is."

"I am thankful for that."

While on the move I spotted an odd building. It greatly resembled a pyramid. I suspected it was a knockoff.

In the Forgotten Village, buildings were either wood or tents, so, though in size similar to a shed, a building made of stone drew my eyes. The suspicion of it being a knockoff also stood

out.

"Guest, don't!," the warrioress strongly warned me off as I tried to approach. "That be Forbidden Triangle Stone, where cursed items are sealed."

"So this thing is not the tomb of the patriarchs."

"Find cursed things, at times, deep in the woods. Evil spirits inhabit them. Seal them in there." Cursed things, she said, but she meant machinery. Well, all civilizations were different.

"...apologies. To make up, me treat you over at marketplace."

The last place I was led to was a square with quite the number of people coming and going. Tents and stalls stood here and there, and a crowd of villagers were enjoyably making their purchases.

"Now this is surprising. So currency is in use in this village, riiight."

"Guest, give you some change. Buy souvenir."

She gave me a money pouch. Within were small stones like konpeitos with their spikes cut off and small stones that seemed to be modeled after pinky fingers.

"Buy with that. Round ones be Warrior's Head, longer ones be Warrior's Fingers. Value be five fingers for one head."

"Heads? Fingers?"

"This village have tradition of compensating war activities. Hunt many enemy heads if you want to be hero. Proof of heroism be decided by how many heads hunted. This be remainder of that."

"Hyeeeh!"

I nearly came to drop it.

On careful observation, the heads had creepy hollows that more or less represented eyes, noses, and mouths.

"I-, in other words this is currency. Thank you very much."

"Not big amount. Treat for you. No need be bothered."

The stalls were mainly desiccated meat, fruits, and pelts, they all traded in food and daily necessities.

"While I am here, I believe I will have something that serves as a reminder, but what should I get?"

"Then you want axe. This way."

The warrioress went walking towards a large tent that hung a sign with the image of an axe depicted on it.

Muscular unclothed men and women were packed within the tent.

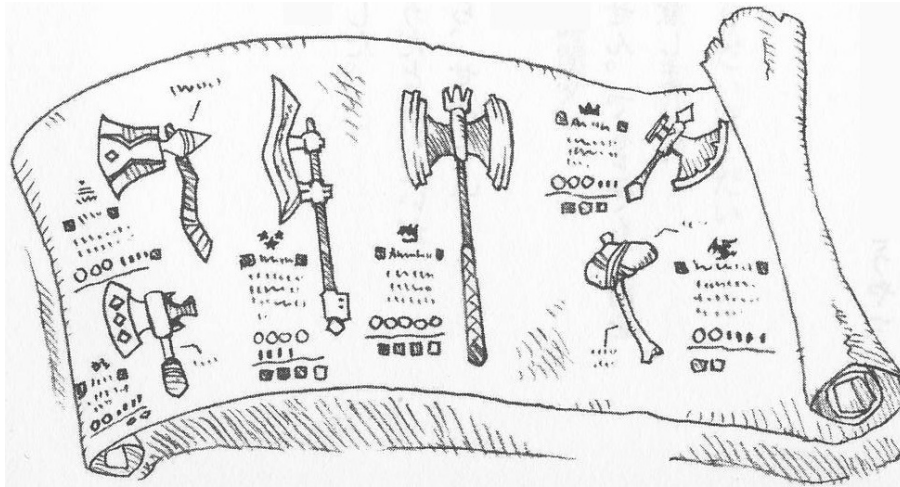
"All of them be tribe warriors, come to choose new color for this year."

And this was not about clothes or lipstick.

The warrioress picked up a scroll that had been left on top of the counter.

"This be this year's new item catalog, have look."

On the scroll handed to me were illustrated the newly-produced axes.



They were elaborate drawings that used colors. Looks like the variety of types of axes they developed had plenty of color variation. It appeared that this village had many axe craftsmen, as there were even logo marks that signified brands. That left me a bit speechless.

"The new one from Barbarian (brand name) be really good." "Alexander's (brand name) two-handed axe not be bad, either." "Well, this year's must-buy be the stone axe from Cro-Magnon (brand name)." "Stone axes be not trendy! Attack power be low! They be out of touch with the times!" "I be totally disregarding trends! I'm sure they will be popular! Cro!" "Why you, you just have no taste!" "Not at all! I be the top trend setter in this village! You guys be old!"

There was a wild uproar all around me, all based around the axes that the warriors were seeking to buy. Though it simply did not seem like a conversation between warriors, no matter how it was interpreted.

"If you be wondering, then I pick."

The warrioress pointed at the catalog.

"Right now, this pink axe be popular among warrior women, it be strong and cute. Put this one in heavy rotation, definitely."

Its price was three heads and two fingers. It was unclear whether that was cheap or costly, however.

It did definitely appear to be a light and easy to swing axe.

"...but I wonder why I get this something-is-off feeling..."

"If you be buying, then get this red armor, it matches."

"No, there is no need for that... and it looks like it would require more money."

I would never wear a bikini armor.

I, to say it, was the type who would never be tranquil unless my swimsuit was a one-piece and also came with a pareo. I was a proper lady. I would never even think of wearing bikini armor.

"It be all right. It would suit you. I be handing you down my own armor."

"What, but there is no need for that, you know? Also, I will not be doing any fighting!"

"The armor I wore when not as muscular would, maybe, be just your size now. It'll work, it'll work."

"It will not work, it will not work."

"It'll work, it'll work."

"It will not work, it will not work!"

"...I want to die."

The worst part was how her old bikini armor fit me perfectly.

The pink axe went well with the faintly red armor. What was the point of the two things matching, that was what I wanted to ask, however.

"Master human, congrats on the class change!" "Congrats!" "From Magic User to Warrior!"

This seemed to be oddly enjoyable for the fairies, because they increased by one more, oh, seriously.

They had probably quickly fallen under the influence of the village's culture, as they were all dressed in a barbarian style.

Being a hand-me-down armor it would be impolite and therefore impossible for me to take it off immediately. But as it did not quite seem likely that I would be able to walk before others like this, I decided to hole up in the hotel room.

"If only I... I managed to hole up until tomorrow, when I am going to leave... I will endure this, somehow!"

"Who are you fighting?" "Who's the enemy?" "A devil or something?"

"There are no such things."

Besides, at this point, this village did not need to have wars with who knows whom, so why did it have such a crowd of people of the Warrior class?

"These people do not need axes..."

"Youngsters are experienced with axes?"

That might not be it.

"Wanna do something?" "Wanna try?"

"Out of the question that I will do anything."

The fairies stared at each other.

"But it's fun!" "I'll go well, somehow?" "Do what you will with your body!" "There's sooo much you can do!"

They had already gotten a fourth member.

Well, I might just be getting tangled in a their vicious pattern.

"Guest, may me?," came the warrioress' voice from the corridor. "It be about time to begin banquet."

"What, what is the banquet for?"

"The patriarch's family be welcoming you, guest."

"Ahhh, thank you very much for that... then I will be changing right away."

"What are you saying, guest?," smiled the warrioress. "That be proper attire."

"No way!"

Did she mean I had to be the guest of honor dressed like this?

"It's all right. It'll work, it'll work."

"It will not work, it will not work."

"It'll work, it'll work."

"It will not work, it will not work!"

"...battlefield death."

Having received torture that was participating to three hours of drinking party dressed in bikini armor, I had become fairly groggy. I was overwriting those feelings of shame while lying face-down on my bedding when, suddenly, I realized that the fairies had disappeared.

"It is much too quiet. Are you not there?"

The trend had been that they were slowly but steadily increasing, but suddenly they vanished, which I found odd.

That said... I had memories of fairies watching and being excited by the play at the banquet where a warrior and a demon (played by a person) fought.

"Why, you be changed already. It suited you, what waste."

The warrioress came bringing me a canteen.

"I could not sleep while in that armor."

Even after handing me the canteen, the warrioress did not seem ready to leave.

She sat down on a chair made of woven string, glancing several times in my direction as I drank the water.

"Uhm, do you need something?"

"Guest, will you come with me to the early morning hunt tomorrow? If you want to be going, I can take you with?"

She leaned forwards and proposed that.

Her attitude said that I would want to see that.

"H-, hunt you say, a proper hunt?"

"Right. Twice a moon, hunting pack goes on the hunt. Only true warriors allowed in hunting pack. Me be still learner. But if guest wants to see, we can follow hunting pack."

"You are not saying that we would be tailing them, are you?"

"Me, I be ordered to show you around, guest. If guest wants see, me have duty to show!"

"Ahhh, so that is what you are going for..."

I thought for a little bit, then gave my consent.

"...me be thankful, guest."

The warrioress politely bowed, then told me that she would call me early morning as she left.

I believed that there had to be secrets within this village.

I would never allow myself to continue my travels without 'sightseeing' *that*.

And so the next day, early morning when the sun had not risen yet, the warrioress and I left the village.

Several people of the hunting pack, which included the patriarch, were spearheading ahead of us.

"Hunting location said to be sacred place. It in the depth of the woods," went the warrioress.

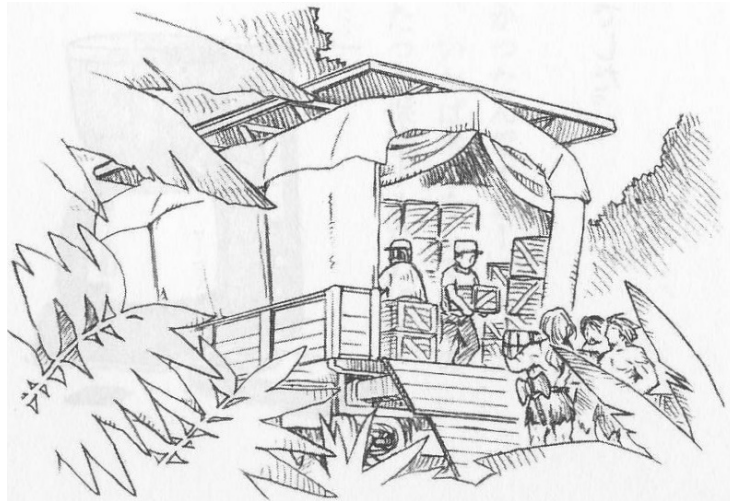
We were shadowing them, therefore we made sure to be stealthy as we advanced.

We went on for around 30 minutes when the hunting pack rendezvoused with another group of people.

"Who be those people...?"

The warrioress seemed not to know. However, I did.

Those were the members of the Salvation Army caravan.



Being a group of volunteers based off their religious belief, even in this age with no currency they were entrusted by the UN with rationing... from food to letters, they were do-it-all who distributed anything. Their distinctive white truck was parked nearby.

"These be people from other tribes... maybe? Our patriarch... what he be receiving?"

The people of the caravan were giving something to those of the hunting pack. The warriors tore into the paper that wrapped the darkish bars and carried them to their mouths, eating them with sloppy sounds.

...obviously chocolate bars, those.

After a friendly chat, they began unloading the cargo.

An uncountable number of boxes were carried into a nearby shed.

...obviously a dispensing of rationing, that.

When the unloading was over, the truck departed and the hunting pack set about unpacking. The majority of the contents were foodstuff and medical wares. A few clothes and sundries were also included. Those were left inside the shed, probably to preserve them there for a while.

"Ah-hah, I have figured this out!"

"What?," the warrioress was struck silent.

"This, you see, is the definition of 'hunt' according to your patriarch!"

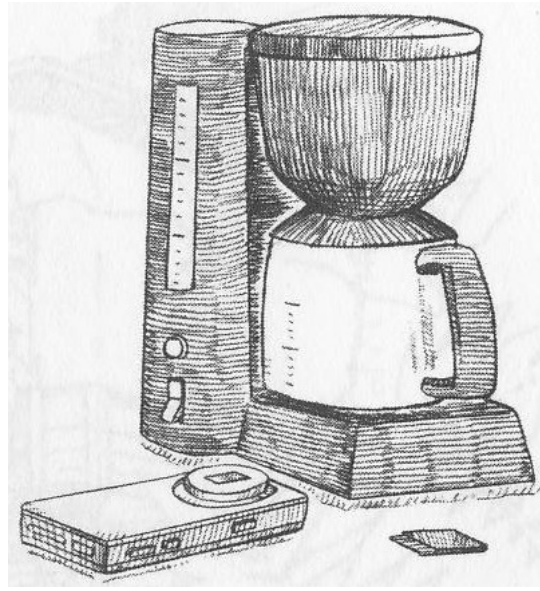
"What? Definition? What do you mean?"

No matter how I explained it, she remained perplexed. Probably, or so I thought, because it was quite the delicate issue for her.

And still perplexed she was as the patriarch, alone in the pack, shouldered a box and retraced his steps. In a panic we concealed ourselves in a nearby thicket.

"What be it, it that patriarch be holding?"

"...what I came to see was a camera and a coffee machine, plus maybe some data storage device."



"A camera, you say? Huh? And... the hunt? Where be mortal combat with enemy?"

"The hunts of this village have nothing of the battle to them."

"Huh-heh-huh?," she made a weird sound. "Then the axes... are what?"

"Decorative."

"Auh, euh, ouh."

Perhaps reality had struck her too hard?

The warrioress turned to face the patriarch as he was leaving and,

"...we follow after patriarch."

She declared that with a face like she did not know what to think.

And so it was that the patriarch entered that one small-scale pyramid.

There seemed to be a concealed path leading underground.

"...do you really wish to go down? Once you know the truth you might not be able to go back."

The warrioress nodded a weighty "we go down".

And so down we went.

The building downstairs was simple, there was only one bigger room beyond a short corridor.

We entered the room and found the patriarch lazying about surrounded by computers.

On top of a desk shaped as the letter L were several flat screen monitors. At their center was a chair that looked comfortable and the patriarch was lounging on it, wearing headphones and following along the music as he typed on a keyboard.

On each of the monitors surrounding the patriarch was a different entertainment software running. A videogame, a music creation program, a player for all sorts of files, a picture drawing program... and many many many more. He was reveling in starting them up all at once on his multi-monitor setup, then playing with them one after the other.

"W-, what the devil is this?!"

As expectable, the warrioress was astonished.

"Bwoah, why are you people here!"

"What be the meeting of this, master patriarch! Were machines not forbidden because they were cursed!"

"W-, wait! In order to better manage the dangerous, cursed items I am doing something like

poison tasting, I wasn't using them for my own ends! To preserve dangerous items for a long period of time it's necessary to know well how they're used, a perfectly rational mumble mumble..."

"And your manner of speaking has changed, has it not."

"Ah... no... it's just that normally I act like that, and..."

An act, then.

"The patriarch... be tricking us?"

Her mouth hung open, the warrioress had sort of the face of a fairy as she asked that.

"No, there's reasons for all this... I certainly did NOT! intend to trick anyone."

"Then we be not tricked?"

"Yes, you have. You have been tricked. This is a scandal!"

The warrioress suddenly shouted.

"So we were tricked! NOOO!"

She was crying in tears as she dashed out of the underground room.

"W-, wait! She-Who-Dances-With-Wolves! Tell nobodyyy!"

The patriarch and I were left behind in the digital room.

"...I am going to ask just as a formality, so, what are your reasons for doing all this?"

"R-, right. Speaking of this to one of the UN requires a bit of courage, though, doesn't it..."

"I have come here as a unaffiliated traveler."

"Ah, you have? You sure? If you're sure that'd help. Bweh heh heh."

His laugh was the appropriately insincere one of a civilization rotten to the core.

"This started five hundred years ago, no, it's actually fact that history goes much longer back than that. The age wasn't certain, the reason that it was the war of the gods is a lie, but the real reason was that our ancestors wanted to live a naturalistic and elegant life as they had seen of the elves that appeared in fantasy novels. Even the records of the age that remain say that they wanted to live with barbecue every day."

The reason I heard was idiotic.

"But afterwards, life in a secret village only became harder and harder, with the standard of civilization falling remarkably behind. Back when I was a child, a birdwatcher discovered the caravan and we have been receiving the assistance of the UN ever since. They assist us in many ways, with foods, clothes, education, and more. I actually went to school in the outside world as representative of the patriarchy, and I'm actually a university graduate. Back then they still had universities. My major is in information sciences."

A university graduate, are we.

"The support of the UN has been so great that life in this village became remarkably easier.

No, far too easy, I could say. However, if the support program were to cease because our village was declared to be self-sufficient..."

"I do not believe this, you are telling me that you intentionally pretend a primitive life only because of that?"

"It's entirely to preserve that support. Understand that the woods aren't a world where humans can live in in the first place. Just, only those in the elite course are, upon becoming members of the hunting pack, given the basic education fit to become a civilized person."

Now that he said it, there was something unnatural in the attitude of that very first person I met in the village.

"So, how do you manage the electricity?"

"Around here there's a mass of plants that had been improved by human hand to generate

power, but had later grown wild. Power generation via photosynthesis, it's called... and we just draw from them as needed."

"If that sort of technology remains to you, then could you not revolutionize the standard of living?"

"No... if we did, it's possible they will cut off support. Mind, we also calculated that the output of electricity was not enough to support the needs of the whole village. A difficult problem indeed..."

"What if you moved?"

"I-, if we did that, what about all my precious, precious vested interests?!"

...this was going nowhere.

"Right, I gotta chase after She-Who-Dances-With-Wolves! I have to chase her, explain her the situation, and ensure she keeps this secret!"

The very moment the patriarch blurted out those belated words, from outside came a shout of, "PATRIAAAARCH! WE HAVE PROBLEM, PATRIAAAARCH!" Was it today's Fairy Time at long last?

The patriarch and I ran, and right after we reached the village square, a warrior approached us and,

"Patriarch, it be monsters! Monsters be attacking!"

"Monsters, you say! There's no such thing, I say!"

The patriarch barked that without noticing that he had slipped into a more modern way of speaking.

"But patriarch, that be..."

A swarm of monsters was approaching wildly where he pointed at.



"What the hell is up with those creatures! There's a limit to how unscientific something can be!"

I thought it a fresh new type of joke.

"Those look like Halloween monsters, I see. Small, but there are imps, ghosts, pumpkin-headed men, zombies, vampires and people-eating tomatoes. They are like a costume parade."

The monsters looked really happy as they made the round of the square, shoving people, emitting lights from their eyes, and chasing after children.

"Heeey! There's people inside them! It's obvious there's people in them! Attack them and flush them out!"

The barbarian-like man began shivering.

"That be too scary, me not can do it!"

"Is that axe ornamental or something! You're a warrior, right!"

"That be much too hard an order, master patriarch, after all, look, there be not a single person who is fighting."

"What...?"

The warriors of the village and their functionally absent fighting skills shuddered at the first sight of the monsters and began fleeing. No, there was just one young heroine who faced down the monsters.

"You foul demons! You be facing me! My warrior's soul be INDOMITABLE!"

The warrioress courageously dove in the group of demons and swung in her axe.

"Oh no!" "We're through!" "G'byes!" "Until the day we meet again!" "You found a new way to get experience!" "Item dropped!"

With just one swung of the axe the pumpkin-headed demon deflated like a rubber balloon, and from the inside many fairies scattered away as if smaller bits of the monster.

"B-, but this means! The fairies... they are filling a niche!"

By niche I meant positions in the local ecology.

In other words, though there were warriors here in this secluded region, the demons, whose presence would bring balance, were instead missing, meaning the niche of demons was unfilled. The fairies merrily tossed themselves into that, to say it. The premonition of fun would have been significant.

"What be these small people!" "F-, fairies?!" "There be swarms of them!"

The square had fallen into a state of utter chaos, with the warrioress fighting alone.

For being demons they were, well, on the safe side, but it did not look like leaving them be would have improved this state of chaos.

"Nothing else to do... I will help just a little, as thank-you for the night of lodging, the two meals, and the souvenir."

It be good thing that I had worn the armor and brought the axe, just in case (I had been infected a little bit, too).

"Yah!"

With an insipid war cry I charged into the center of the bustle.

...this I only realized later, but I had the feeling that, being Halloween monsters, I could have ended this by scattering sweets about. Well, whatever. It was a done thing.

"Master human, master human!" "Can we play around here for a while?" "Being here feels that everyday is a let's-party!"

The fairies had requested that, so I parted with them as I departed the village. It felt a little sad, but I did think that, for the time being, that would have been for the best.

Months and the years passed, and on the return from my travels I once again dropped by the Forgotten Village.

"Ah, it's you! The legendary traveler! It's been a while, has it!"

That very same warrioress quickly noticed me.

The warrioress had grown a little since then, but she still wore her bikini armor and her axe as usual. If I had to say what had changed,

"Your articulation has improved quite a bit, I see."

The warrioress gave me a sheepish grin.

"It's only expectable, since we're really mingling with the outside these days."

"It does look like you are thriving, and that is a good thing."

Tourists from other lands came in in droves, with them the number of stalls and booths increased, and the prosperity of the village became evident. That armor and axe rental service was not there last time.

"It's all thanks to you. All thanks to how you revealed the patriarch's secret. Tourists have increased a lot since then, and while UN support has ended we're still doing well, and best of all, it was done without belittling our pride as warriors."

"I am happy for you."

"As for the demons, no matter how many appear we never truly exterminate them, but even when they attack nobody gets injured, they're easy to defeat so it's fun to do so, and occasionally they even drop food or other items. That's all very well received by the tourists."

"What happened to the patriarch?"

"Right now I am the patriarch. The previous patriarch has withdrawn to private life, for a while he was sequestered in the pyramid but, lately, he's expanded the underground room and opened a computer café."

"My, that is interesting. I must drop by later on."

"I don't know whether the old fart will be happy or not, however."

The warrioress said that, then smiled brightly.

After that, I lodged at the same hotel and in the same room, wherein I opened the memo I had written for my *Human Habitation Guidebook*, which I meant to write after I had finished my travels, and read back with nostalgic feelings what I had noted down back then.

"The Forgotten Village... as long as there are fairies one can enjoy a fun and safe hunt, making it likely to become famous for being a village hidden in the woods. I will drop by in the coming times, because spreading rumors of this village is also its own entertainment."

Sometimes even I do good things, you know?

A Not Very Unexpected Creature
Lurking in the Shadow of a
Recently Revived Village



"Adventure Village?"

"Exactly! Go down this path for a few days and it's right there! In the beginning I wasn't very inpa, but now I find it awesome!"

The young lady traveler asserted that with intense body motions.

The trunk we were using as table was impacted, and the teacups that were on it shook.

"Inpa?"

"In Park."

"Mh? What does that mean?"

"It means that it's an awesome experience!," she blurted out loud.

"I-, I see."

I bent backwards slightly.

"By the way, this village called 'Park' that lies ahead, according to the map, what is it about?"

"That might just be that Park Village has changed its name and became Adventure Village, isn't it."

As always, the map was not quite reliable.

"But the name of the village doesn't matter! Because it's sooo much fun! Why, even I had to extend my plan of staying three days into a two weeks stay!"

So she asserted vigorously, and as if she still had not had her full fill of fun.

She was a traveler that had come from the opposite direction as I. As fellow travelers, we found common ground in teatime.

"What sort of land is it?"

"One that has sooo much playground equipment! Enough that one day won't be enough, understand! Every day there's the uproar of a festival, there's crowds of people, there's many shows on offer, and it's generally really lively!"

"Playground equipment? Like see-saws and swings?"

"Nothing like that, no. But I'm telling you, go there and have fun!"

"You seem to be very pleased, indeed."

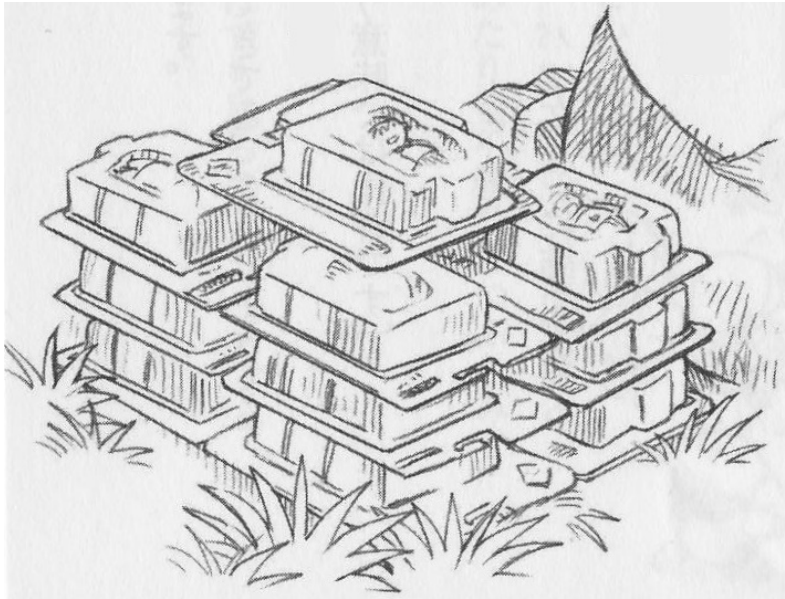
"I wish I could go back right away!"

"That good, then..."

A village of mystery that could entrap a young girl. It was certainly interesting to me.

"Say, by the way, what's that?"

What she pointed out were the blister packs piled into a mountain at the side of the road.



"Those are merely packaged dolls."

"My, how cute."

She took one pack in hand and stared hard at the fairy inside.

"Say, you have this as a side job even though you're traveling? They're extremely well done. It's like they're alive. You sure they're hand made?"

"Strictly speaking they occur in nature, however, in the sense that I built the possibility for them to manifest, then I am their creator."

"...hm-mh?"

I did not reach her.

"I mean, I got carried away and I created 13 of them, so I thought I would package them and distribute them. If you wish, you may have one."

"My, may I?"

"Of course. Note, though, that depending on your chemistry with them, he might disappear."

"...hm-mh?"

A memory. These were the events of 30 minutes earlier.

"Delish!" "Konpeitos are a taste that you never get tired of?" "How do they emit this scent of sweets?" "But lately it's been only this, what about?" "They only differ in color!" "...even yesterday we had only konpeitos!" "...and so the day before last!" "Provision of sweetness may be insufficient!" "So much I'd like to eat cake!" "Is it out of the question?" "This is lacking in effort, what about that?" "That might be true!" "Is it about time we ask even if it's unreasonable?"

I firmly declared this without even looking in the eyes of the fairies as they looked up.

"...N-O."



"Ohmmmy?"

The fairies were at present thirteen.

My fairy companions in these travels of mine were doing nothing but increasing.

Ever since I had gotten accustomed to traveling I did not miss my five o'clock daily teatime.

Teatime then equaled teatime sweets time.

Result, the fairies also busily increased.

But the teatime sweets were honestly a little bit on the lacking side. Preservation was foremost on my mind, meaning things like cake were out of the question.

These lacking teatime sweets were to be subdivided across everyone, making it logical that each had to be given one single konpeito.

Providing materials for sweets at my destinations was serious business.

To the point that, at times, I borrowed kitchens at the places I was staying and made them myself.

"Sweets? You actually make them yourself? Do you need that many during traveling? Do you need to climb a mountain or something?"

People of all sorts told me things along those lines.

"What can we do to have a more leisurely lifestyle, master human?"

"Decrease."

"What...?"

Strain ran throughout the fairies.

"It is not that supply is not enough, it is that demand is too large. Snacks to be had with tea are limited. With a decrease in those eating them, the lifestyle of everybody will become more bountiful. In short, we are restructuring."

"That's convincing?" "Sort of like agreeing with that?" "A reasonable idea, huh!" "What's restructuring?" "Sounds like an old word!" "So it does...!"

One of the fairies looked up at me.

"Ristorante?"

"Downsizing. Restructuring in that sense."

"...that's the restructuring in which we're fired?"

"From the standpoint of employer, if possible, I would like this to be not firing but a grateful

and voluntary retirement from the company. If the percentage of firing is too high, ours will be thought of as an evil business, do understand."

"...voluntary retirement from life?" "...grateful?" "...master human, your laws are cruel?" "...but sort of cool, too!" "That's for sure!" "Retirement from life!" "So cool!" "Amazing!" "Decrease? Should we decrease?"

Being fired was embarrassing, but voluntary retirement hit their genuine sense of value, and the fairies seem to have fallen for that hook line and sinker.

"But it is much too sad for you to be suddenly restructured. I prepared this as an alternate plan."

I took out blister bags with nothing in them.

There were plenty ancient cutting-edge technologies (please ignore the contradiction) buried here and there, so I managed to find these quite easily.

"If you hibernate in here peacefully we can cut back on the consumption of sweets. And the next time you open your eyes, civilization will have advanced and houses made of sweets will have become common."

The faces of the fairies lit up as if literally illuminated.

And then—

"Whoops. They all went in the packages."

Despite how I wanted to keep at least one in my pocket...

It was just then that the traveler approached me from the opposite direction of the street.

"You gave me such a nice thing. In exchange I'll give you the rest of my tickets."

The traveler gave me a ticket book where about half of the tickets had been used.

"By exchanging these tickets you can get on the attractions, eat food, and more. Make sure to use it!"

"Thank you very much. You can preserve that doll in the short-term by putting it on a shelf somewhere, but you may also take it out from the pack and use it as a charm."

"So you can do that with this? What a strange thing."

And so we parted, each going walking towards our opposite directions.

It appeared that my next destination was going to be the habitation known as Adventure Village.

"Adventure, huh. I sure hope that a grand blood-boiling body-dancing adventure... is not waiting for us."

And praying that as I walked on went I.

"Free fall Ferris wheel! Wait time is one hour!"

"Mongol-style carousel in a battlefield, a mere thirty minutes of wait for a ride, starting now!"

"Our deepest apologies! Mach-speed coaster is a two hour wait!"

"Please do not go outside your lines! If you leave the line even temporarily you cannot go back to the same spot! Those who need to use the toilet, please inquire with the personnel!"

There was a mess of machines larger than even the ruins of the buildings that were all around me.

These giant monsters of machines were all playground equipment.

At their feet were crowds of people forming lines. They were tourists.

Adventure Village turned out to be an amusement park far more vast than even my predictions!

"...where are they getting all the electricity from?"

I may not have had a hundred battles to me, still as a troubleshooter with a dozen battles to her I was so shocked I felt like I had suddenly turned into a fairy.

It reminded me of the uproar about the Same-Sex Magazines. Same steaminess, same population density.

The people were making lines here and there.

"M'kiii! Congratulations for being in-park!"

This was the first villager that talked to me.

That first villager was wearing a mascot character costume.

"This is the first time I have experienced this in my travels...!"

Also, 'in-park' seemed to be official lingo, I saw.

"M'kiii! Welcome to humanity's last amusement park, Adventure Village! Say, do you have any tickets?"

"Wah!"

I was overwhelmed by that pink rabbit wearing a tuxedo.



"T-, tickets, you do mean these?"

"Ah, I gotta apologize. It's hard to see with this on, you see. I'm gonna take it off for a sec."

The rabbit suddenly say that with the voice of an attractive middle-aged guy, took off the head mask and revealed the face of the person inside (he was an old guy), shredding on his own his identity as mascot character.

"You ought to never take that thing off..."

My shiver of fear seemingly did not reach the old man as he was lost checking out my tickets.

"Yessah! These are second-hand, but they're the real deal! Young lady, please be welcome."

The old man firmly asserted that, then wore his rabbit head once more.

"M'kiii! Tickets are given for free, but there's a one week waiting time, so good for you!"

His head worn back, he returned to his cutesy rabbit talk. His voice was also high-pitched.

"Come now, the dream of Adventure Village is waiting for you!"

"Excuse me, I do have a question, if I may, are the attractions here safe?"

Every one of these massive machines was moving at high speeds, and a glance was enough to make me uneasy from how dangerous they might be.

"M'kiii! Adventure Village is the fairy-touched world of dreams! It's a dream, so it's *definitely* safe! Being asked that makes Petey sorta depressed~."

The rabbit held his head with exaggerated full-points charm to him. He was quite adorable. Though he was an old man.

"Ah, that's right, young lady! Our Adventure Village has gone through a very long road in order to recover all the dream machines that you see~. You can learn that history at the Dawn Tent over there! Make sure to go there~!"

And right next to the small building he called the Dawn Tent there stood a bulletin board with this very showy declaration on it

Adventure Village, number of dead people since opening..... 0

"Well, I just wanted to ask what was what, that is all..."

"Even better, the Dawn Tent doesn't require any tickets! It's totally unique in that!"

"No, I mean..."

"Even better-better? We'll keep this a secret, all right? In the Dawn Tent... there's the mayor of this our Adventure Village~! For reals~! You gotta go there~!" Then Petey took off his head and added this. "Waiting time is also zero. Make sure to go, all right!"

"And I am still wondering why you take that off!"

Why this place, it was so sloppy.

"...and so it was that the residents of Park Village, though living in poverty, learned machine technology and succeeded in restoring the old machines that laid forsaken. It has been ten years since then, and surrounded by many amusement machines, the villagers now intend to live onwards in endless fun. And they lived happily ever after."

The slideshow called Dawn of the Village had ended at last.

The speaker was a quite plump older man maybe past his sixties. His slow motion-like way of speaking invited drowsiness.

Smothering a yawn in my teeth I gave him an applause with no force behind it. I was the lone viewer.

"Thank you, thank you. The first visitor in a long while put me a little bit under strain, you see."

The mayor smiled cheerfully.

According to the slideshow, Adventure Village seemingly used to be a natural preserve.

That was far in the past. Before humanity had declined.

The land was thus swept by depopulation, and, it went, the movement to restore the town had been very active.

And so they invited waning stars, incorporated gardens, sponsored events, and at the end of that painful expansion after painful expansion, they settled into borrowing a massive number of the amusement machines and putting them into their territory.

And finally came the Godlike Combo of bankruptcy → buildings turning into ruins.

A long time passed until people returned to the uninhabited land once again.

They went through the hardship of fixing up the abandoned machines, and so we reached today.

"This village appears to be quite trendy among young girls, I see."

"Heh heh heh, the effort truly paid off, I can say."

"What do you do for electrical power?"

"We use lots of power, that's true. Well, we're supplied by the UN."

"What, how?"

"In the beginning we only got a little, enough to fulfill the population. That much was properly requested. Then we made a single amusement machine start up. When we did, what do you think happened next?"

"The amusement machine awoke and became sentient!"

The mayor's face went blank for a second.

"Why suddenly with the science-fiction?"

"Y-, you are right. Things like that do not happen exactly often, do they..."

"A machine that emitted that much sound and that much light was now operational. Heh heh heh, the answer can only be one. Exactly, people came. Lots of people."

"Uh-huh. That would have made for good revitalization for a waning village."

Surmounting an eternity of time to fulfill one's ambitions had quite a bit the romance to it.

"We provided the experience of the attractions to tourists without compensation. Snacks and drinks, too. And as we did all that the number of people who moved in also increased, and guest participation went up in a straight line... we once again petitioned the UN and had our power supply increased."

"Ah, so that is how it went."

Certainly, so long as population increased, support would become more plentiful. The caravans would also mobilize more vehicles here.

In the present day, where there were villages that pretended decline to unlawfully gain provisions and electrical power, this might have been quite the healthy thing to do. Although it was maybe a little mercenary... the feeling that welled up in me was that, as present staff members, they should work a little bit harder.

"A personal and naive question, if I may, but what is the population of this village?"

"Heh heh heh, this year we will have surpassed the fifteen hundred."

"My, congratulations on that regard. With a population like that, even if external support were to end, you will be able to preserve a life of self-sufficiency!"

While praising him I sneak-wrote a memo underneath the desk.

"Right. Even better, we have visitors that keep visiting us, meaning that we should be gradually increasing that number even from here on out."

"How many visitors do you get?"

"Around eighty thousand per year."

"Eighty thousand! That is shocking! This village is thriving marvelously!"

"Yes it is, yes it is."

"When petitioning the UN, do you also include the number of tourists stopping over in the calculations for your population?"

The mayor's smile disappeared.

"...uh, I get it's rude, still, what's your job?"

"I am unemployed. However, when my travels are over I am thinking of publishing my travel's memoirs."

A lie only a small battletank veteran of a dozen battles could tell.

"That would be wonderful. It'll make for good advertisement."

The mayor made a relieved face.

"Myyy, I was so tense. I suddenly wondered whether you weren't actually an UN employee on vacation."

I thought it a good thing that I lied, ayup.

"By the way, have you been on any of our village's amusement machines?"

"No, the waiting time was much too long, so I visited here first."

"That's no good. Those who come to our village must enjoy our attractions."

The mayor suddenly rose to his feet.

My special treatment under the authority of the village's mayor had thus begun.

I was then a special treatment guest who could ignore the normal visitors that were forming queues and enjoy the amusement machines with preferentiality.

I was thankful for the consideration, but...

"What... you want me to ride this...?"

A monster towered before my eyes.

Attraction #1 *The Undead Assassin - The Free-Fall Ferris Wheel!*

Certainly, as far as what was parked there, it was certainly the car of a normal Ferris wheel. What differed from the normal was how, once started, it would fall horizontally and began revolving at high speed, repeatedly rising & falling with the support pillar in the center.

"Bwah, amaaazing! It's so the free-fall Ferris wheel! Number three in popularity in Adventure Village! Whaaa... excuse me a sec."

Petey the rabbit, whom I had suddenly encountered, took off his head.

One of the child guests that happened to witness this began crying.

"Heh heh heh, sort of forgot my line there."

The old man was furiously taking notes.

You don't need to be worried about this sort of events, the mayor had told me.

"Well, come on and ride."

"No, I am not really into this sort of thrill rides, well... besides, in the first place, is this thing safe?"

"It's all right. Not a single accident has occurred so far. If I'm to say it, what sells this village is safety!"

I was pushed in.

"Ohhh nooo!"

...it was a hellish experience.

However, the drama did not end at that.

"F-, free fall... no more free fall..."

The mayor pushed me and my nearly limp body onto the next machine.

"This is next!"

Attraction #2 *Incontinent People Beware - Mongol-style Carousel in a Battlefield!*

What a carousel lacks is punch!

That may be what the creators had thought, I did not know for certain, but this machine was set up in what looked like an ancient Mongolian battlefield, and accelerated very intensely.

What surprised me was that there was not even a safety belt, and to avoid being tossed down one had to hold on to the horse's head for dear life. "It's a battlefield, after all," smiled the mayor.

I was jostled about in every direction.



That included the thrill of being nearly skewered by the spear of the puppets of enemy soldiers.

The attraction's age limit was 18 to 35.

This was not a golden age of sports athletes, after all.

The dynamic invasion experience of these equestrian people left me worn out.

"T-, the Gs... the acceleration is bullying me..."

"What gathers crowds are stimulating experiences. The machines installed in this our Adventure Village are all at the polar extremes of intensity, you see, heh heh heh!"

"Intensity? Ex... tremes?"

Blood was not flowing to my brain.

My reason returned to me right after I had been put to ride the next attraction.

Attraction #3 Your One-Way Ticket to the Subsonic Realm - Mach Coaster Ω (Omega)!

"And now, the number one attraction in our village by popularity, the Mach Coaster!"

The mayor declared that solemnly at the coaster's platform as I, in stark contrast with the previous attractions, was clamped down by a number of devices and was unable to even move an inch.

"Normal rollercoasters are called 'jet' coasters despite not using jet engines, but ours is different. Please, make sure to savor the difference!"

"...what did you just say?"

The coaster began moving.

And there, suddenly, I recalled that at present I was in a world of Of.

Fairies had by nature the ability to envelop the world in Fairy-Tale Time, pushing the dramatic away and inviting trouble within.

It was written that, if I had at least one fairy, nothing that would happen would ever hit a dramatic end.

The figure that displayed the density of these *fairies* was *f*.
Of meant that there was no fairy activity located in that area.
In short, when one died, one died, as normal.

"Please stop."

However, the coaster made weighty clu-clunk clu-clunk sounds as it reached a high spot.
From there I had an unobstructed view of the whole track.

It had mountains, it had valleys, it had spin, it had fiendish ups and downs like 3D-fied cursive writing.

"Heh."

I snorted.

Why, the raw stupidity of humanity before its decline!

Nice going there, enjoying this kind of dangers in the Of World of Reality.

Should an accident happen it would not simply end as a cliffhanger at the end of a volume, would it. After all, a human life happened just once. It was something that would not be given back once lost. That was what life was. Was that not why one ought love one's neighbor, and with that love cooperate with them to deal with the tragedies of life? And all that preciousness of life put in danger for the likes of a brief moment of entertainment. To express this accurately, this is a stupid☆idea, a stupid☆plan, stupidity☆itself, taken to their extreme and nothing a person given with wisdom ought undertake. It ought come natural given our decline. The act of savagery that is riding a rollercoaster flies in the face of the job of an intellectual species that ought to carry on the torch of wisdom, in other words this is seriously so scary I might die, all right?

...or so went the curse that I muttered (※as witnessed by the people riding behind me).

It resounded at the center of my consciousness:

it was Wagner's famous Ride of the Valkyries.

That was the confusion of my mind laid bare.

And still, as the track approached its end, I had managed to regain a little bit of calmness.

What awaited as climax was a straight line with a one-go drop from 80 meters of height down very nearly to the ground, then a slow rise to reach the goal of the end platform.

That was a relief, it was not that scary.

But the very instant I thought that I saw that the rail right before the goal had collapsed.

"!?!?!"

The rollercoaster's track was interrupted, was it not!

Ah, I will die, I thought that, yeah.

Of was fatal.

Reality was cruel.

Ahhh, sooo good of it not to hurt.

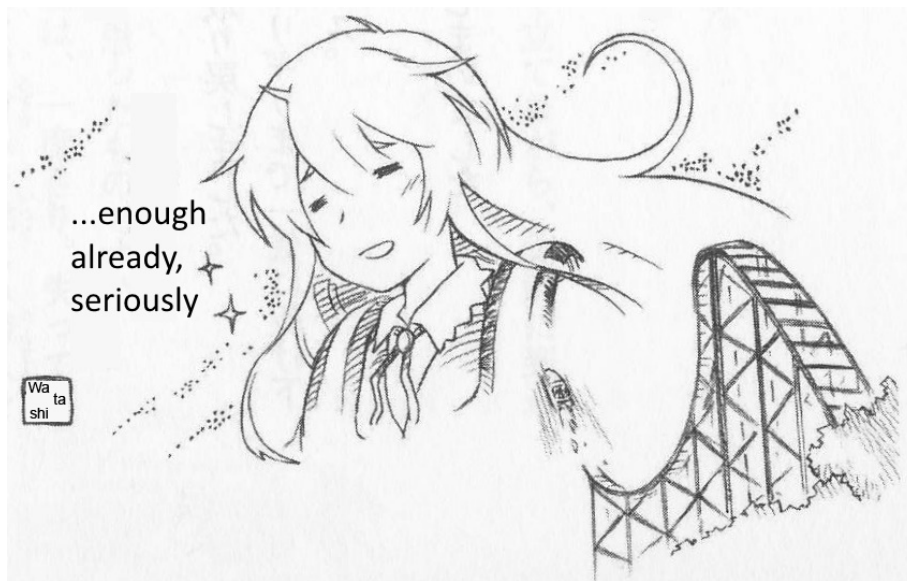
Quite a bit before the collapsed part, the coaster suddenly accelerated.

The guy had spoken something or somewhat about a jet engine.

But the situation was whatever either way.

The coaster itself floatingly hopped off the rail.

"...enough already, seriously."



I wanted to leave behind a wise saying that would remain in history, but in reality I had nothing better to say than that.

"Whopsie, excuse me. I sort of forgot my line!"

With those words I was familiar with, my consciousness, which had been dazed until then, felt suddenly refreshed.

I was sitting on a seat in an outdoors theater.

On the stage was the rabbit wearing his tuxedo, his mask off and his real face bared, reading back the play's script.

"Ahhh, that's what it was, that's what, this is the line. Sorry, sorry!"

He wore back the mask and continued, "now then, right here is where I call my cousin, Benjamin~! You all in the audience also call him with me, all right? Heee~y, Benjamin!"

Attraction #5 Unlimited Cuteness - Petey Rabbit's One-Man Show

The mayor, sitting next to me, whispered that.

"Number 4 is missing..."

"I took you there, but you seemed to be there only in body and not in mind. Was that how MACH! the Mach Coaster experience was?"

It was.

I had survived.

The coaster's car had flown over the interrupted rail.

Then it beat its wings up in the air, and landed bang-dang on the right spot as if by coincidence. It smoothly slid all the way to the goal like nothing had happened.

But that was happenstance.

"We have to stop that rollercoaster right away!"

"And why's that?"

"Its track is broken! Although a good thing it happened to successfully land, a coincidence like that would never be repeated!"

"No, at present it has completed many hundreds of such landings."

"Huh?"

"Sure thing is, in the beginning the track wasn't broken. But at some point the rail broke down... yeah, they said it was metal fatigue... right then the coaster car was headed for the goal and, though we were sure we would have dead people on our hands, for some reason instead it reached that goal safely and has kept doing that every time."

"That is ridiculous."

"But it happens every time."

"E-, every time?"

My jaw felt like it would drop to the floor.

"Yes. That was a surprise functionality that used to be part of the coaster's track to start with. We don't understand how it works, but it's all part of the thrill of the experience, including that final jump from that broken rail as controlled by some sort of mechanism."

"Do you not believe that that sort of thinking is much too lazy?"

The mayor looked just a little bit guilty.

"...the reception of that has been outstanding, you know? It's all fine, isn't it, even if there's a little bit of a problem. The village is happy, the visitors are happy. Everybody is happy."

"You should decline a little bit more."

It was simply proper that the likes of this humanity would be in decline.

...I ought have left those behind as my famous last words, ought I not?

Periodic maintenance was being performed the very next day. On the morning after I had been allowed to lodge, I stated this in front of the whole of the staff of Adventure Village.

"Please, search while you are performing maintenance."

"For what?," went the mayor.

"...for fairies."

I elicited laughter.

"We've lived here forever, but we've never seen a fairy."

It was down to individual differences whether one could see the fairies or not.

That was why, despite their existence having been officially accepted, some responded with, *"do you really believe they exist? LOL!"*. They laughed at that.

"Split up and search for them."

"Whatta pain," said one of the staff, annoyed.

"Is something odd? If you think that there are unnatural things, then I will give you an important warning. You must, if you please, focus on the search for them. If you do not search properly, the UN will be informed about all you do, understand?"

The mayor, who had already been informed of who I really was, went pale.

What the hell, awww, such a pain, grumbled the various members of the staff as they dispersed.

"If they were to find none, then you'll leave the village alone... right?"

The mayor's insincere smile was brimming with toughness, as if he were saying that he would not let his village fall into decline and that any opening he found he would exploit and develop further.

As far as the results go, they were easily found.

"Well, I tumbled in before power had been shut off and charged straight into a non-insulated spot... I thought I'd die of electric shock, but instead, this is all that happened to me."

Saying that was one of the two people who had been inspecting the playground's electric

lines.

He had afro hair and was scorched black all over, but he was in good health.

"I'm fairly shocked, but it seems like I'm unhurt. This sort of things do happen."

Mr. Afro gave me a nonplussed smile.

...things like these did not simply happen.

I had the man lead me about to the place where it went down, and when I peeked through the access hatch, I found what I predicted I would.

"BztBztBztBzt!"

One fairy was tangling with an electric cord.

"...uhm, mister fairy?"

"Yessy?"

"What are you doing?"

"Getting shocked?"

"Why?"

"It's my current obsession?"

...he has been electrifying himself for several years in a row only for that reason, I see. But of course, I said.

In other words, we were in the world of 1f from the start.

The reason why there were no deaths despite poor maintenance was this.

And after extracting the fairy, the operation of the machines that had been inspected, this happened, indeed it happened.

"Bwah! The Ferris wheel fell off its axle and rolled off!"

"The wooden horses couldn't handle the centrifugal force and shattered!"

"Our precious Mach Coaster smashed into the ground!"

Hearing the reports of the villagers one after another, the mayor took to his knees in despair.

"It does look like that these ancient technologies are quite rusted out, does it."

An amusement park falling apart all at one time was, in a certain sense, a magnificent spectacle.

"The growth of our village..."

The poor mayor had turned completely pale.

"So what do we do? Close down temporarily, find out the root causes... but restoring everything would require time, I guess. What will you do for rationing tickets? Maybe you should put out some other show for a while? What do you think, mister mayor?"

"The growth of our villaaAge..."

He became a little bit weird.

But right afterwards he returned to his self and said,

"Right. How about borrowing the power of the fairies once more?"

"That... I personally do not recommend."

"Don't say that, let's just do it!"

"Well, you see~, I say you should stop right there."

By begging for dear life I more or less managed to persuade the mayor, then I returned to the bungalow that I had been graciously lent for lodging and found a child I did not know playing with the fairy figures (that were however the real thing).

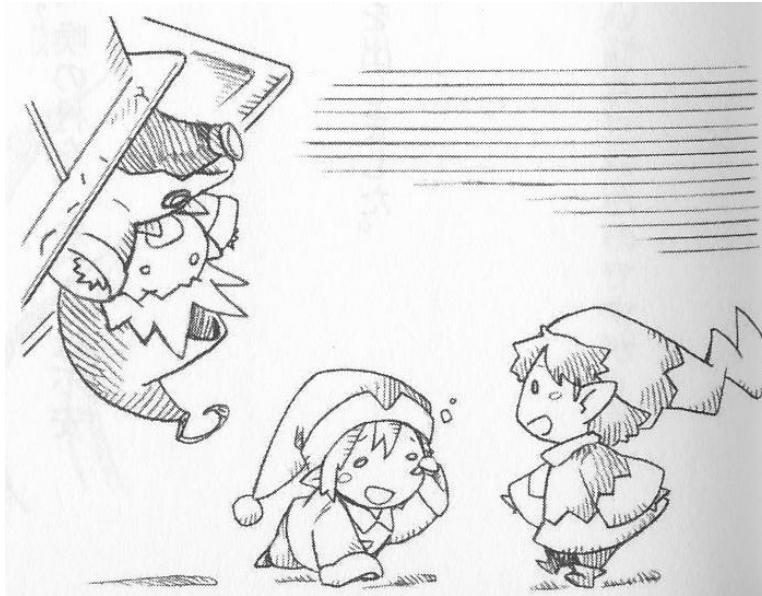
"Who might you be?"

"I'm Akao-san's daughter!"

"So you are," and she was also of the age in which there was no helping in pointing out the

obvious facts.

The fairies that had been taken out of the blister packs were all frozen.



"Awww, they were all sealed and now they are all free..."

"I got hungry."

The girl suddenly stood up and, still holding one of the fairies in hand, tottered away.

"Awww, and she took one... seriously."

If this happened, then it had to be fate. I went spinning a finger into the bellies of the fairies scattered on the ground one after another. Tumbling here and there as they were unable to stand properly (their motions were dulled when just woken up), the fairies began fidgeting back to life.

"Thanks for the purchase!" "Sooorry for not being figures!" "Apologies for being alive!" "We're raw things!" "Can we still be promotional goods?"

And then—

"Bwaaah! The Ferris wheel is flying in the air like a flying saucer! It's even kidnapping people!"

"T-, the wooden horses are walking on their own! Look, there's even wooden foals! They're breeding fast!"

"The track of the Mach Coaster is growing like a vine!"

—this happened, to quote.

Sounds like all of the amusement machines had woken up and became sentient.

"Wh-, what the hell... is all this...!" The mayor was shivering in fear, but suddenly he grasped my hand hard and said, "this is a thrill that surpasses the thrill! This is gonna be hugely popular! Thank you, miss Mediator!"

"Ah, this vision of Hell is OK, then..."

With feelings full of anxiety I left behind this Pandemonium Village where massive playground equipment stomped the earth so hard it trembled.

"Goodbyeee, come agaaain!"

The villagers saw me off with broad smiles.

"I even got quite a few gifts to bring home... are they sure?"

As I muttered to myself just the one fairy showed up from between my hair.



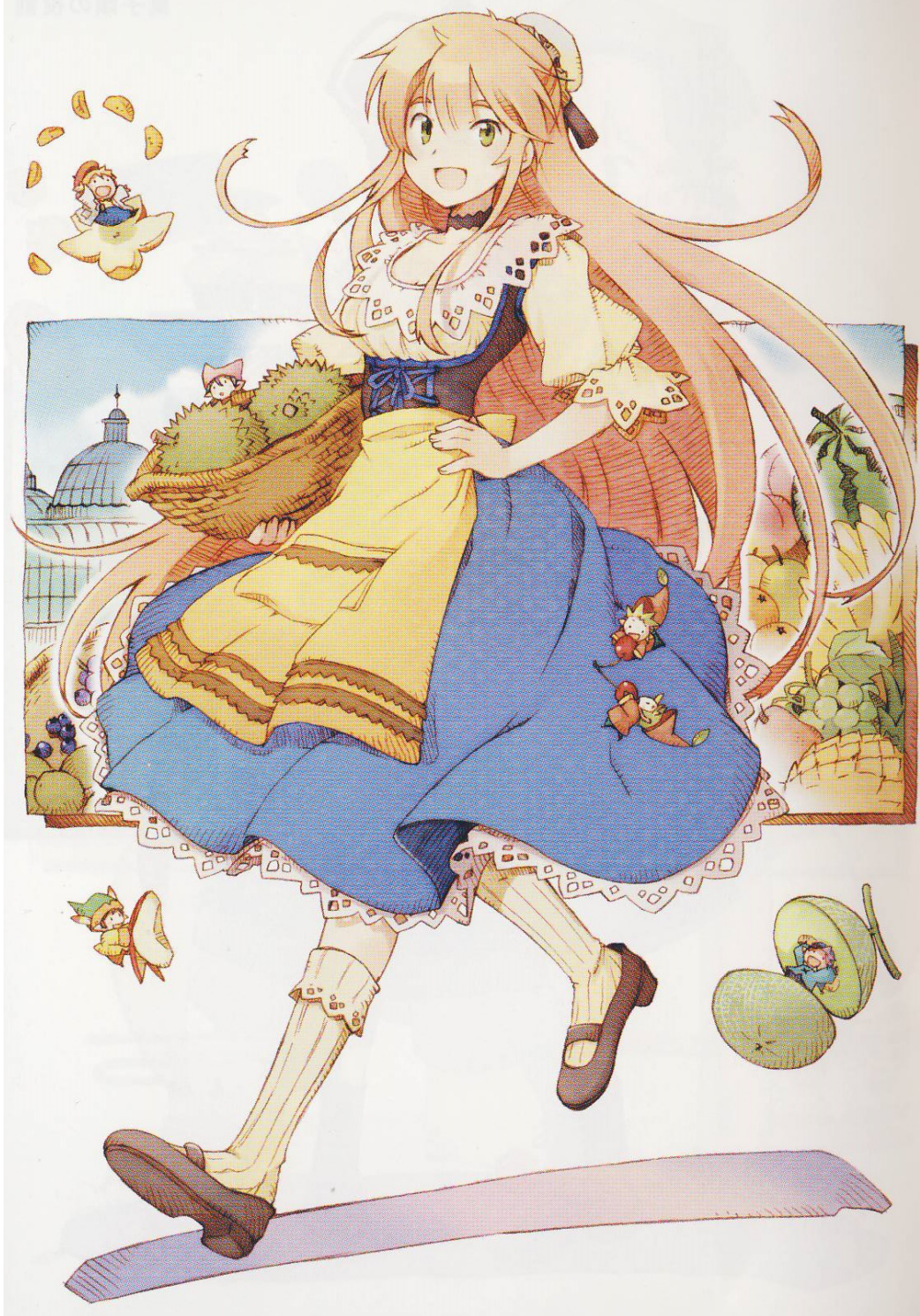
"What you'd call, a fair decision made in human kindness, isn't it?"

"What kind of decision would that be?"

"Who knows?"

If he meant it was fine not to clean up after myself, then that made me feel severely bad, but walking down a path surrounded by greenery, going down the road stress-free as the fairy and I merrily chatted, I completely forgot about all the things that made me worried.

Just Say No to Fruits?



My travels continued.

Around when I was seeing a village far in the distance, at long last, the fairy that I had in my pocket, previously Rounded Up, juttied out his head.

"Whatever else, I feel a good smell coming up?"

"It does, it is a nice smell. This is the smell of fruits."

"Fruity!"

Fruity alcohol. Fruity sauce. Fruity fruits.

Exactly, humanity loved fruits.

They were sweet and tasty, and marvelously fruity. They are also indispensable when making sweets.

"It appears that, whatever else they got going for them, that village has large fruit fields."

There were rows of well-maintained honey-colored houses in the space between two gently-sloped, small mountains of pale green.

The sweet scent came from the orchards spreading beyond them.

"Expectations: vast."

Well, it would be nice if I could publish a long report on what I was sure would receive a Nobel Peace Prize, the book I will have published once my travels had come to an end, the *Human Habitation Guidebook*.

Happy Fruit Village.

That was the name of the village. It would not do to say that it was a silly name.

So I will only think that. Still, it was peaceful. And peace is an important thing, you know?

Gazed on from a somewhat tall hill, I could tell that the village had a number of streets. In the past, that was an important point for traffic. It reminded me a little of the land features at Kusunoki Village.

"Welcome, welcome, we have all kinds of fresh fruits!"

"We are full of fruits! How about an Everlasting Spring Parfait!"

"We have a cooking sauce that simmers well with the flesh of fruit! No food goes without it!"

There was a crowd of tourists, and barkers were also plenty.

"Well, shortcake or cherry pie, which one will work better, master human? Well?"

The excited fairy was indirectly requesting that I made either.

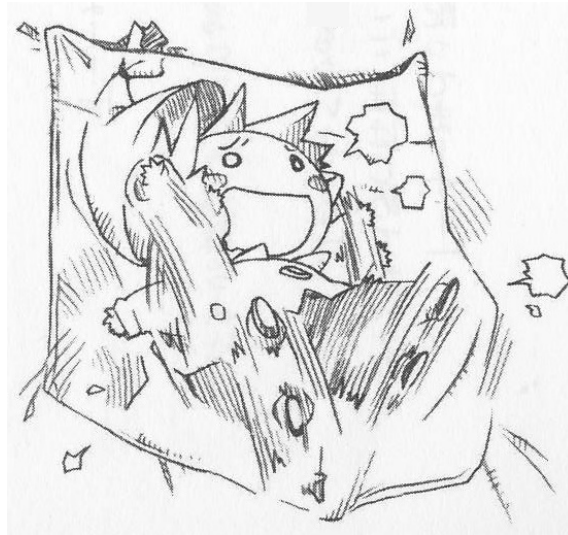
"If I could borrow a kitchen I could make them... but it appears that doing that will be unnecessary."

"You, miss, yes, you over there! Have a free fruit set!" "Well now, first time here? Grab an ice cream with blueberries!" "We are at present distributing fig biscuits!"

In an instant I had gained enough eateries to fill my arms.

"This is amazing. This is all farmed by them."

It appears that, of late, every village was putting their back into capturing the tourists.



"Gib me tea sweets, gib me calories!"
The fairy was raging inside my pocket.

"See you!" "Until the day we meet again!"

I loaned a lodging, gave sweets to the fairies that had (sad to report) multiplied, and after sealing them in a trunk so that they would not increase anymore, I headed into the village. The main street was all barkers. Here and there they provided travelers with the fruits they were so proud of. Because of that, the street was quite bustling with activity.

It was a land of abundance.

There was also plenty of variety.

Being a cold land, they even had the varicolored fruits of the north.

I had heard that, in its golden age, humanity could eat any food they wanted whenever they wanted. It was possible that those high-level farming technologies had survived even through to the current era, perhaps. That would be have been the doing of fairies.

"...likely."

Cake, biscuits, and pancake:

fruits were a food infinitely close to sweets.

There was the possibility they had come to this land in the past and did *a little bit of something* to accelerate fruit cultivation.

That said, I was quite fed up with this pattern where fairies would create hazards and caused turmoil during my periods of repose.

My earnest desire was that, occasionally, I would find more primitive villages skillfully managed by an unmixed humanity of yesteryear.

"People, what about a magical fruit that surpasses common knowledge of fruits?"

It happened suddenly:

I heard the disquieting term, *magical fruit*.

"W-, what kind of fruit would that be I am very interested due to my standpoint~ (teary-eyed)."

I charged this because my standpoint was such that, at least provisionally, I simply had to investigate.

"Well now. You are interested in our magical fruits, you have sharp eyes."

The owner of the stall, a girl less than 20 years old, took out this 'magical fruit'.

"T-, this is... what?"

It was a bizarre something I had never seen before. Should I push it and compare it to something, then,

"A chestnut?"

"Durian."

"A sea urchin?"

"I said it's a durian."

"It sure is too big to be a chestnut or a sea urchin."

It had a diameter of about 30 centimeters. It was crowded with spikes, it looked powerful.

"First time seeing a durian?," went the girl's explanation. "It's called the King of Fruits."

"My, that is amazing. Is it that tasty?"

"Eh... ah... s-, sure."

The girl's reply was stuttered. But that, too, was just for an instant.

With a full-face smile she then lifted up a hatchet with a spiritedness such that it seemed to be directed at diverting my attention.



"This is how much fun it is to try to eat some!"

"Now just wait, I heard 'durian' and I ain't ignoring that."

An older man with a displeased face came in from a nearby stall.

"Duriens got this tremendous stench to them. Didn't you know that or something? It's thoughtless to bring one up where there's so many people around."

The old man's tough words elicited just a calm snort of a laugh from the girl.

"A normal durian would, of course. But this magical durian is different."

"An'how would it differ?"

Before anyone could stop her, the girl wordlessly swung down the hatchet.

And when she did!

"What a good scent!"

It emitted a fragrance so marvelous it did not seem to be a part of this world.

"W-, what the hell, this durian, it's got a scent so wonderful I couldn't even think it was one...!," went the old man.

"How about it? This is the true power of a magical fruit!"

It was so scentful it was like being in heaven.

"Just going by the scent we can have good expectations about the flavor, right?"

"Do we? Then let's not waste any time and have some at once!"

The old man and I simultaneously took a slice of durian from the platter thrust at us and put it in our mouths.

When we did...

""Yuuuck!""

"I knew it... it was bad..."

"This tastes like hell itself, does it not!"

I filed my complaint with teary eyes and the girl all too easily confessed.

"Durians stink. That's why I bred them and developed a durian that smells good. That said, as price, its flavor degraded..."

"Why are you giving this to tourists?"

"Well, there's all sorts of tastes around, so I thought maybe I would find popularity with some hardcore audience."

"You bet on a million to one chance, have you?"

"...I'm an adult, after all, so I want to contribute with the goal of increasing the number of visitors to the village..."

The old man gave words of comfort to the girl as she mumbled that as an excuse.

"Sure, all sorts of fruits are on offer here on this village, so there's nothing better than helping out with them. Well, you gotta proceed more carefully."

It seemed that, for being a village of plenty, it still had its own problems.

I passed past the front of the church and found that fruits were being distributed even there.

"We got fruit from the Tree of the Discernment between Good and Evil!"

That was the fruit that appeared in the Bible.

According to Christianity, Adam and Eve were the first humans. The fruit the priest spoke of belonged to a tree that had a lot of history, being the one they ate when betraying God.

When eating this fruit one could gain God levels of moral mastery, they said.

Being interested I had some, but I found it was a simple apple.

"...this is much too disingenuous."

The theory that the fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was an apple has been a staple dad joke for a long time.

There was not a trace of the shadow of the fairies here.

I received the fruit, thanked the pastor and listened to his own thanks, then headed for the next one.

"Our offer for the day is a fruit that will generate certain strife! Come, come, come one and come all~!"

I allowed myself to be lured in by that barker.

Already all around me a crowd of visitors had gathered who were as curious as I.

"Well then, look here! This is the fruit of strife."

The owner of an orchard lifted the cover of the round plate that laid on her stall.

"What's that, it's just a tomato, isn't it." "I don't think tomatoes bring strife." "And I was just wondering what kind of rare fruit I would see..."

The crowd raised its voice in complaint.

I did not speak out loud, however I felt the same.

The owner accepted the discontent with a nonchalant face.

As it happened, one of the older ladies said this.

"Say, were tomatoes fruits?"

That one line generated a quarrel.

"That's right, tomatoes are vegetables in the first place, right." "No, they're fruits, aren't they?"

"I think that around here, in the past, there were taxes on vegetables, so tomato cultivators asserted they were fruits or something." "And when was that?" "What, they're normal fruits, right?" "Not sweet means they're vegetables." "Wait, isn't that definition too strict?" "At my village they're vegetables, I guess." "No, I'm telling you, they're fruits." "Well, now I don't know anymore."

The owner watched the verbal sparring with a satisfied face.

That was his trademark joke, was it not.

And so, well, the argument continued on without end as we ate the slices of tomato that the old man distributed.

And so it was easily understandable that Happy Fruit Village was a honest land, one untouched by the influence of fairies.

I of course would not have minded if it had had that influence, but since I came here to forget about my job... well.

"How would you like some banana?"

"Thank you. I will have some."

Just walking down the street made me receive as much fruit as I could have wished.

This being a good chance, I might just make some teatime sweets to carry around here at this village. Hm, dried fruits... yes, a desiccated banana might be nice.

"This banana is really delicious."

"It is. It's the product of Kusunoki Village. For some reason yesterday I suddenly had some delivered. I've no idea why, I think it's some misdelivery, since it's not like these keep forever."

"...huh?"

And then..... it seems that I spaced out for a while.

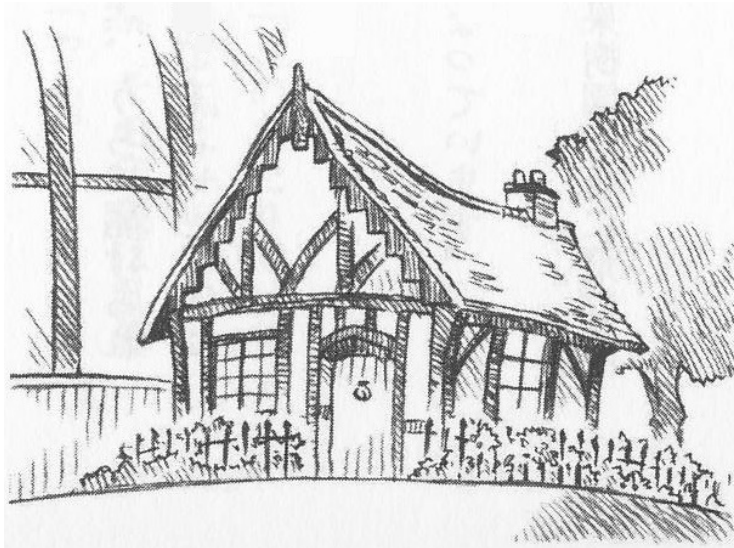
The next thing I noticed was that I was alone, standing stock still next to a road.

And it was right around an hour from when the sun would wane entirely, was it not. The wind felt just a little bit chilly on my skin.

I decided to return back to my lodgings for the time being.

I was walking right alongside a small river no more than a few meters in width when, eventually, vast orchards came to my sights. They were surrounded by several Victorian-style greenhouses.

Following the road I went walking past the greenhouses where I found a plain, single home with a tiny garden surrounded by fences.



It was quite the small estate, about two rooms in size, perhaps, and its deep amber walls and a fence decorated with flowers of all colors drew my eyes.

I would want to dwell in this house so like one would find in a fairy-tale.

I would not ask for too much. So long as there were a bath, indoor plumbing, toilet, and heating.

"That's asking for too much, yes."

I had unconsciously let out my voice, which was answered by someone.

I looked to find a girl with a tired face, her back leaning on the house's wall. I remembered her.

"Could it perhaps be that you were the one distributing durians at the marketplace?"

"...yeah, and you're that one from back at noon. Sorry about all that."

"It is nothing. More importantly, you seem troubled by something?"

"You're a traveler, right? Then you wouldn't know, I don't think, but our village is doing very well on food self-sufficiency. That's why everyone in the village receives enough food to live."

"Is that aside the rationing of the UN?"

It is, nodded the girl.

"The land 'round here is said to be magical. Whatever else, fruits here grow so well it's bizarre. And no matter what land it's from, mind, from northern countries to southern countries."

"A magical land! How did it come to that?"

"Don't know, but everybody's wondering if the fairies haven't magicked it up. I instead think that the humanity of the past re-engineered the soil, though. But no one knows the truth." With no traces of intervention by fairies, it had to be the latter, I believed.

"Still, as long as one is cultivating fruits, this is a happy village."

"And you just went and stuck that name to it, I see."

"We can exchange surplus fruits with other villages and not lack in daily necessities, either."

"Are you not then blessed in every way?"

"Yeah, it's an amazingly nice village. That's why even the unemployed and the good-for-nothing slackers don't starve."

"That is quite easy on everyone, is it not?"

"But that's shameful, yes!," and the girl stood up with good force. "They might live even

without contributing to the village's business, but they feel low when meeting others, and whatever else they won't become Charismatic Fruit Creators!"

"Fruit Creators..."

"You need creativity to belong to the farming families around here, so that's what they're called."

"C-, creativity?"

"Just making fruits won't draw the interest of tourists. You saw that too, right? It's all about gathering people with whatever tricks you got."

"...you are all doing well, are you not."

No interest in a humble decline here.

"That's what youth is about! Youth demands being active on stage!"

"Earlier, you said that you had cross-bred the durian. How did you do that?"

"I used the research greenhouses right there. But, sad to say, I wasn't up to the task in knowledge and technology, so at present I'm studying very hard."

"Then how did you get that durian with a good scent?"

"That was a coincidence that happened during interbreeding."

So it was the product of coincidence!

I will now explain the basics of fruit selective breeding. I feel like I have done this before, however.

The main component is selective breeding via interbreeding.

For example, common apples were red, but, at one point, someone thought of producing a rainbow-colored apple. The first thing to do was to grow normally a large number of common apples, select those among them closer to being rainbow-colored, and interbreed them. But just doing that would not cause much change. Nothing would get done in a single generation.

That is why one must repeatedly continue picking the desired qualities and keep interbreeding them for many generations.

For countless generations, up until one reached a rainbow-colored apple.

As you might be able to tell, the problem with this method is that it takes a preposterous amount of time.

"That is a long path, is it not."

"Worse, durians take a long time to grow. With the quality of the soil and the type of breed it's possible to reduce it, but regardless it still takes a minimum of two years, yes."

"Ought you not switch type of fruit?"

"...maaaybe. But when I became an adult, the seedlings given to me as commemoration were of a durian, so..."

I see. There was pride on the stake there.

"All right, that is enough complaints. I spoke enough with someone who was just passing by on the street, yes."

"That was not a problem. Doing this is the true blazing light of traveling."

"Traveling'd be nice, yes. I've never done it. Sigh. Maybe I should take this and move to another village. Where did you come from?"

"I came from Kusunoki Village."

"Woow! That's some city, isn't it. If I moved in, would there still be work for me?"

So the Village was now a City...

After that, the girl readied some tea in her house, and for a while we enjoyed a conversation with no real point. Then, on the instant I opened the door to return home as it had become

night, this happened.

There was a massive sound like the boom of an explosion.

The village's people were also in some big hustle.

"It's a disaster! The inn exploded!" "Is there any fire?" "Seems that a trunk inside one of the rooms forcefully tore itself apart!" "With a force so massive that it blew off even the roof!" "I have it that there was a massive number of stuff like rubber balls stowed inside the trunk!" "Is this terrorism, the one you always hear in the rumors?" "Who was it that rented that room!" "AhWahWahWahWah..."

I understood the gist of the situation in an instant.

This was bad. It was my fault.

"No way... was it the room you rented?"

The girl hit the point square on the head with a strained smile.

...as the conclusion to many things, I had the girl intercede with the matter of the destruction of the inn.

I was glad that this was an altogether too relaxed village, so it was all laughed off and I was forgiven.

The cause of the explosion of the trunk (as everyone I believe can tell) was that the fairies multiplied explosively inside the trunk that they had been sealed in.

The shock of the explosion made the fairies turn into balls and scatter around everywhere.

It was all right, I did my best and recovered the majority of them. That was what humans did, there was nothing to do if they were imperfect. ...I did pray for the equilibrium I kept my skills at would not collapse.



"It's a small house, but you can stop over for as long as you like."

I came to be hosted at the girl's house in the stead of the empty room that had exploded.

"Thank you very much, thank you very much. I am in debt with you. Ask for anything within my possibilities."

"No need to worry about this, no. It's lonely living on your own. Doing this once in a while is fun."

"What a nice person you are..."

She was a person so nice that I felt like I wanted to solve her problem, even if what it took was more or less a cheat.

"What's this?"

The girl stared with wide open eyes the wooden box stamped with the provenience of Happy Fruit Village that laid before her eyes. It was no mere wooden box. It had been Improved.

"The *Selective Breeding Special*?"

"Huh?"

"It appears to have that as name. It is one of the high-risk, high-return and quite convenient tools that the fairies make. I want to give this to you as thank-you for all that you have done for me."

"Fairies? What? What do you mean?"

"I requested it yesterday evening, and this early morning I found it at my pillowside. With the details for another time, as long as you use this, selective breeding should be a joke, maybe."

"Still, I gotta say that the inside of this box is packed with elastic bands?"

She ended up seeing the interior mechanism from a gap in the box.

"Do not mind it. It will only make you go bad in the head..."

It worked on elastics, but that was nothing to worry about.

This was the correct way of socializing with fairies.

"Let us try it right away."

"Eh? Ah?"

"Usage is simple. First, insert two durians via the top hole."

We opened the top service hole and inserted the two durians we wanted bred.

"Huh..."

"Next, the operator will appear, so please input the desired result."

"Operator?"

Once the durians were inserted in the hole, the front of the box slammed open and a fairy was pushed out on a tray like the bird in a cuckoo clock.

The fairy was wearing a beret and a white coat.



I supposed he was going for looking like a picture artist.

"I'm sorry for any trouble?"

"Something small appeared, and it spoke!"

"This is a fairy."

"What? This is a fairy? Heard they were the present rulers of Earth... what? This is one of them?"

The fairy ignored her and continued speaking.

"What's your order?"

We, of course, wanted to preserve that sweet scent.

"As tasty as possible. But it is vital that you preserve its fruity scent, please."

"Yessah! How many do you want?"

"Ten for now."

"Your order is appreciated!"

The fairy withdrew inside the wooden box alongside the tray.

I could see how, inside, there were many fairies shackled in chains like slaves, engaging in hard labor. But I decided to ignore it.

...besides, they decided to be shackled with chains by their own selves anyway.

As the top and side covers closed, the wooden box began emitting a dull (and elastic-ish) sound. It shook with an unsteady rattle, and one could really feel that the thing was doing actual work.

"This here, will it be all right? It won't explode?"

"We will be fine, maybe."

Several dozens of seconds later, the front cover opened, and ten durians rolled off, tumbling out of it.

"They really came out, yes... what was all that about?"

"This is a Fairy Tool, these sort of things do happen."

"Now where did these durians come from, I wonder? These are clearly larger than the size of the box, though."

"It is best not to think about that sort of things."

As a test we tried splitting one, and the girl let out a gasp of wonder.

"These have an even better scent than the one from before!"

"So, it is now about the flavor, to say it."

My eyebrows simultaneously crumpled.

"...it's still bad."

"Well, perhaps it is because it is a first generation, so the change cannot be felt yet."

"In short, this tool accelerates breeding, right."

"I would be much obliged if you could be flexible when thinking about this."

The girl reverently lifted up the wooden box.

"Amazing. This is what you'd call actual magic! I don't know much about fairies, but this is still amazing, yes!"

"These durians have good scent, but if you also made one that tastes better..."

"I'd have a monopoly in the village!"

...so that was what you were thinking about.

With the girl's true ambitions aside, we set out to selectively breeding the durians.

We made a massive number of durians, choosing the two that were just barely tasty among the many that were nasty, chucked them in the device, and repeated.

"Energy is low-like, how about? (firmly demanded)"

"What is this 'energy'?"

"...cookies?"

Inserting sweets in the input slot would make for energy, truly a work of the Marchen. It was cheap as a price.

"All else aside, I can't tell if this is a convenient device or an inconvenient one, can you."

"It will do no good to think about that."

We baked and baked cookies as we spoke like that.



And then.

"...the flavor isn't changing at all! What does this mean?"

"Well, this is already the seventh generation, right? We would of course hope for some change."

Did this mean that even with the *Selective Breeding Special*? we would have to do more work ourselves?

As we had kept on working on the spur of that moment, we were getting very very tired.

"...we need something to divert our minds. Wait here."

The girl left and returned holding a lot of bags.

"What are those?"

"I had the neighbors give me all sort of fruit seedlings."

"Ahhh, that will do fine. Let us take a break and play."

"I'm wondering if we can't do something that you eat and lose weight, or that you eat and become happy?"

"That sounds like fun. Let us try."

We amused ourselves in playing with reimagining a variety of fruits.

The results were as shown below.

* **Depression Berry**

A blueberry that, when eaten, makes you imagine yourself as being too high in spirits and floundering about in vain, with the result that you give in to depression. For when you want to calm down.

* **Grape of Wrath**

A grape that, when eaten, makes you imagine yourself as a master of the arts of fighting. However, you do not actually become a powerful fighter, so you have to not actually fight. For when you need to go all out.

*** Wiki**

A kiwi that, when eaten, will make your memories of something once read, but now forgotten, come back as if read off a dictionary, giving you the affectations of an expert. That said, the precision of the dictionary depend on your personal specs.

"...I for some reason get the feeling that we have created something that we ought never present the world. Particularly the Wiki."

"But the effect only lasts five minutes, you see? You can't use them to cheat exams or things like that."

"You indeed cannot. Regardless..."

I stared with hollow feelings at the mountain of other created fruits.

"These were created easily and have impressive effects, that they have. We quickly achieved goals that would usually have taken multiple generations."

"But why is it that durians won't come out right?"

"Please tell me, sensei."

I approached my head and inquired to the fairy in white labcoat, who tilted his head in response.

"I might be the sensei, but there's lots of stuff I don't know?"

"That is deep."

"Say, say! Let's change the approach for a bit."

"That would do fine. In what way?"

"I feel like we have to choose between flavor and smell. How about we do the opposite, we try to make a really delicious and really smelly durian?"

"That would do it. This time we fix the flavor and go without masking the smell in any way."

We tried it.

We promptly had a taste test of the durians that rolled out of the box.

"I must say that I have never experienced the true smell of a durian."

"...then you should make yourself very much ready."

She sliced a durian in half with a hatchet.

Immediately, a dense smell filled the room.

"Haw!"

I collapsed.

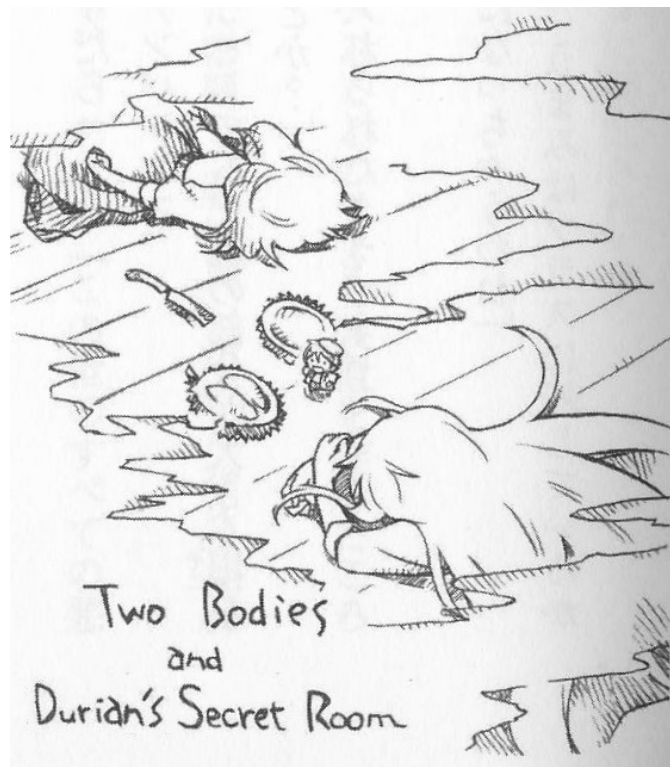
"Haw!"

The girl also collapsed.

"Haw?"

The fairy... did not have a nose, so he seemed fine.

Two Bodies and Durian's Secret Room (in the style of novel titles).



"...wait, we are not dead!"

I lifted myself right up and, crawling, I opened the window wide.

"I'm used to it, and still it felt like I died, yes."

"That was a stench like the whole of the evil in the world had gathered together," I could not stand there and not review it. "Right, it was an experience like adding eggs and old dust cloths, make them rot, then fermenting them, boiling them, and finally deeply inhaling the vapor of the resulting hot water with all your lungs."

I covered the problematic durians with a clean sheet, which obstructed the smell. Still it leaked out, so the room remained thoroughly polluted...

"I wish I had opened this in the research room. Seems like this smell will persist for a while, yes."

"If the stench can be so easily amplified to such extents, why did this not work befo-..."

My eyes as I was saying that were drawn by one thing. Specifically, a small pair of scales that were put on a shelf as part of the interior design.

"Could it not be that the taste of the fruit has already been improved enough, and it has reached its own peak?"

"That's right. And the fruits we have had until now were all complete as far as breeding."

I put a finger on one of the plates of the scales and pushed it right down. Imbalance.

"Though balanced at the highest levels, even if we put a strong force on it, the other side can only lose out, significantly so... meaning we can prioritize either between flavor or smell, something like that?"

It was mere inference, however it was accepted as plausible by a girl who had that as her main job.

Haaah, she exhaled a sigh and,

"Then making that durian tasty is a hopeless cause, yes."

"That is not necessarily so. For as much as the scent is a minus, the taste might have become a plus...

Our sights fixed on the sealed durian, covered by a sheet.

"...shall we taste it?"

"...we gotta taste it."

A nasty sweat formed on my forehead.

It became quite the hard taste test. First, we had to begin by constructing a device that would allow us to eat *this*.

"Made of something like vinyl or something." "Something like a gas mask." "Perfectly sealed."

"The stench might stick to the clothes otherwise." "A hole in which the arm can pass down."

"Put the rubber gloves into the box."

It took around an hour to finish the durian eating device, and we could finally have a taste test of All the Evils of This World (name of the variety).

And when we did,

"It is delicious!"

"It's amazingly delicious!"

"It is preposterously delicious!"

"It's disorientingly delicious!"

"If I am to express this sensation... then how to put it... it is delicious!"

"It's so delicious that it revolves all the way around, it's yucky!"

"No, that is going to be misinterpreted."

"Ah, will it? But I'm sure that will definitely work."

"No more jobs for us?"

The fairy raised his voice in sadness.

There was already light coming from outside the window.

The power of an all-nighter of youth had caused a miracle to occur, making it a night that I would never forget.

I resided there for a few more days after that, and the two of us put the new durians on sale to travelers.

The stench of these durians was terrifying, and they could not quite be exported to other villages. Consequently, it was offered as the ultimate durian that one could only eat in this land.

The result was a rousing success.

It had to be eaten so that only the head would fit into a case that was hermetically sealed, so that the smell would not go outside, which was of course problematic, but rumor called rumor and we had a long queue day after day.

The young girl could fully call herself a Charismatic Fruit Creator, and her name now had the renown for that.

"You saved me, yes. Come back to visit anytime!"

"I will, definitely."

We promised that we would meet each other again at another time.

I did recover the fairies from the *Selective Breeding Special?* (and they made merry for a while after that), and to improve our moods we of course ate through the bizarre fruits that we had created, they were our responsibility after all. With this, the typical troubles that involve fairies did not occur, and everything was fine and they all lived happily... never after. Sad to say, there was a punchline.

This was the experience we had at a village that we dropped by a while later.

"Kih shih shih, milady, I got some good stuff. Have a look."

"Stuff?"

The teeny little girl invited me to an alley, and seeing what laid there, I gasped.

"This is a Pick-Upper grape that makes you happy when you eat it. It'll make you feel like you can do anything! This is the Get-Downer blueberry. It's nice for when you're angry. And this is the Smart-Alec kiwi. It improves mental abilities. If you want any, I'll exchange it for something rare or for sweets!"

For a moment I could not form words.

"...lea."

I put my hands to my head.

"They leaked...!"

Later, a letter of apology from that one girl reached me at Kusunoki Village.

On it was written that the seeds of the fruits we thought we ate through had escaped, gone feral, and spread through the lands. They in other words had leaked and had influenced a vast area, making recovery impossible. *Sorries, forgive me, also I'm coming over to visit this Summer*, was also written.

Meaning that, at present, while an unacceptable kind of fun had been eradicated from that village, unacceptable and illegal fruits had infested it in its stead.

I am yet seriously considering whether or not to include this event in my *Human Habitation Guidebook*.

The Role of Sweets in the
Formation of Monarchy



That village used a monarchical system.

And, for some reason, I had been chosen to be the queen.

"...what?"

At some point I was handed a crown and a scepter, as well as a cloak. I was taken to the imperial palace, made to sit on the throne, and found myself before vassals all dressed to the point in ceremonial wear.

"...whaaat?"

A vassal that looked friendly stepped forwards from his line and made a polite bow.

"These suit you very well. We await your orders, Your Majesty the Queen."

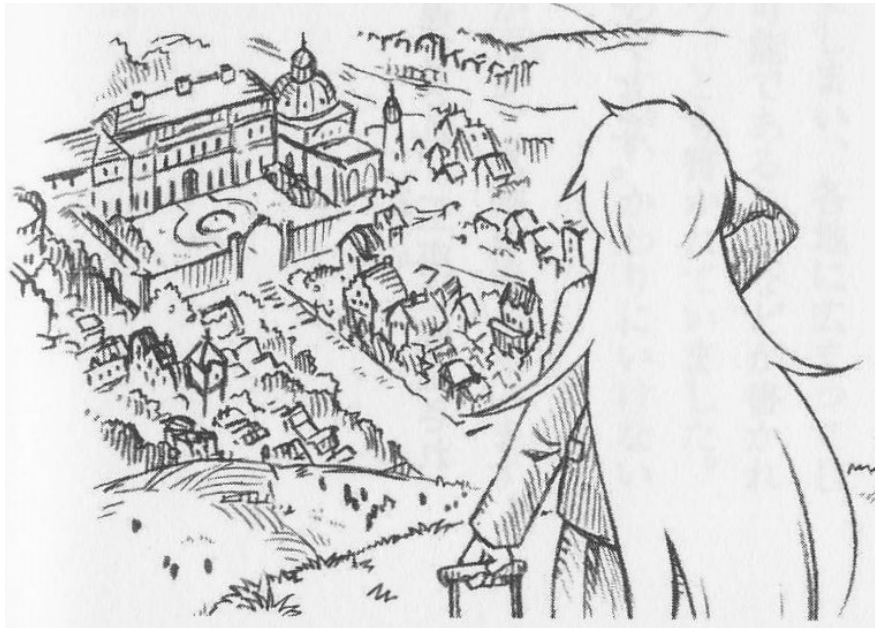
"...WHAAAAAT?!"

Let us rewind the tale a bit.

This happened three days before, when I first visited the village.

"Wah, so beautiful. Amazing. So very Marchen!"

From high ground, i could glance over the clean and beautiful townscape of the land called Southern Village.



What stood out was, what else, the imperial palace at the center of the village. While small it was in the rococo style, it was a beautiful building. The main street and smaller streets extended with it as the center, there were colorful houses each of their own color and shape, streets that boasted rhododendrons and azaleas, and a massive grazing ground spread past the hills.

"My, how picturesque."

This village will be featured in my *Human Habitation Guidebook*, which when printed will be (possibly even be) hailed as a historical reference book.

For now I turned around fully and went the opposite way.

A gray stronghold leaped into my sights.

This was called Northern Village.

The basic townscape was similar. It had a symbolic building in the center and a cityscape that

grow around it as an offshoot. However, this was no rococo palace, it was a fortress with harsh angles.

The vast residential area was surrounded by an imposing wall, and the houses set in strict rows were of an unadorned stone make.

"...no pretenses here."

The cold wind passed even through my heart.

"Southern and Northern: these villages different in who knows what and who knows where have to be getting along very well together."

I meant to address my companion fairy, but he did not respond at all.

I tried taking him out of my pocket, but found that he had Rounded Up. Fairies got like that when sleeping or trying to evade an enemy.

"We're not getting along at all. In the past it was different, but now..."

I turned my face towards where the reply came from to find a girl in her late teens clad in a white dress standing imposingly with a cane behind her back.

"Ah, the first villager."

"How rude. We are not a villager. We are the Queen."

She puffed her chest with pride.

"So it was the first royalty..."

"We are the Queen of Northern Village. You may call us Queen."

"What a good Queen."

"Indeed. And you appear to be a traveler, one who naturally wishes to visit Northern Village."

"It is exactly as you say, Your Majesty Queen."

"We are sad to say that you must give that up. At present, our village is under martial law.

Besides," and she took the pause of a breath to peek into what I had in my hands, "you have a fairy egg, correct?"

"So you know about them?"

She did not answer my question, instead the Queen made the toughest of smiles.

"Normally We would drag you away for questioning, but We will let that go due to you being a foreigner."

And so went my meeting with the Queen of Northern Village.

The fairy recovered from its Rounded Up state just as I entered Northern Village.

"I'm foreseeing something delish?"

The cause was in the Spring-like scent emanating from a mobile stall well stocked with baked sweets that stood in the center of the square. Around it, people were busying themselves by diligently carrying sweets within.

"Excuse me, sir. Is this some kind of stall that sells sweets?"

"No, not at all. This is an offering!"

One older lady stopped and explained me that.

"Is it for a festival or something?"

"No, it isn't. These are sweets offered to the fairies!"

Sorry but I'm in a hurry, went the older lady as she left at a brisk walk with an emptied plate in hand.

"Sweets for fairies?"

I could not believe it, were they for the fairy that was riding on me?

"...it does not appear to be so, however."

"Is this the happy place?," asked the fairy.

"I wonder, now..."

Shlp, and from the edge of the fairy's mouth there dangled a bit of drool.

"Deliish!" "Deliciousette!" "Why are sweets so material, yet so delish?" "It's the tech of master humans, maybe?" "It's as frustrating as being material is!" "But I can't stop!" "I wanna become diabetic!" "There's lots of ways to do that around here!" "Shall we multiply?" "Increase in number?" "Feels like it would be yummy if we all ate!" "Wish it was like this every day!"

That evening, the foreseeable tragedy occurred.

The massive number of sweets in the mobile stall all vanished suddenly in a single night! The village was in uproar. Naturally, the rumor spread even to the lodge for travelers that I was residing at.

"What a mystery! Who could ever have done something like this? Is this even the work of humans?!"

And I was there, in the lodge for travelers, with as many fairies as one could want, all holding their fattened bellies as they napped, piled into a small mountain next to the bedspread, wishing to do nothing else but to escape this reality.

One hour later I would actually put my head on the line.

The village whole was in an uproar, and for the time being, I had been dealt a confinement in the kitchens.

"...it is to cry."

But I had not been dealt with harshly and, with the nuance of a light punishment, I broke eggs and kneaded the dough, engaging fully in the work.

It seemed that this used to be a food hall, and there was room on the floor for customers, too. And that floor was currently busy with a crowd of villagers talking to each other.



"What do we do! Those sweets were the result of the concentrated efforts of the village whole!" "We need replacement sweets right away..." "We do, yes. But we don't have enough ingredients..." "With just biscuits we can't beat Northern." "Damn this! Isn't there a master of the sweets arts anywhere?" "There's one in Northern." "That'd be an enemy!"

While I could not quite make out what everyone was talking about, it seemed to be a serious problem.

The old lady in charge of the fire who was in the kitchens consoled me as I laid dispirited.

"You shouldn't worry about this. You must've consumed all your foodstuff during your travels, so you had to have been starving, right?"

"No, it is nothing like that..."

I did not say that it was the fairies who did it (it was the typical excuse that a mischievous boy or girl would utter).

"Northern and Southern got along well until a while ago, but recently things became strained."

The lady gave me an explanation while she kneaded the dough for scones.

"What, was it a war? In this age?"

"Ever since a new queen was enthroned in Northern, we've been smelling nothing but gunpowder in the air."

"How does that relate to the sweets?"

The lady opened her mouth to answer when a nicely broad-shouldered older man showed up here in the kitchens.

"Hey, you, how did the meeting go?"

It looked like the two were married.

"...like this. For now, we're making as many scones as we can. Whatever we don't have of anymore, be it fruit or alcohol, we replace, but it doesn't look like we'll make it to the next banquet."

The husband exhaled a sigh.

"Excuse me, but do you need variety in your sweets?"

"We do. Not just type, but also quantity. About as many as you've put away, mind."

Paf, the wife slapped the husband, and he apologized in a lower voice.

"...if you would like, can I compensate you a little bit more?"

"This is what I made by mixing things together."

I neatly lined what I had made on the counter.

The residents of the village, tired from the meeting and with the aspect of an all-night wake, came close and opened their eyes wide.

"It's all sweets I've never seen before..."

"These here are called macarons. They have jam and cream fillings, and every color has a different taste. With some tricks I was able to make ten varieties. These are called biscotti. They are a baked sweet that feels crunchy under the teeth, see. And, these are sablés. They have much more butter, and have a texture that feels different from the biscuits'. The majority of fairies do not like bread. But they will eat crackers and rusk, with some trickery, for example, if shaped like canapés... wait, what are you doing?"

The people in that place were staring fixed not at the sweets, but at me.

"...say, you, you're skilled at making sweets, right?," went the old lady.

"Yes, well, comparatively so."

"We can have some, just to try them, right?," went the old man with a serious face.

"Yes, of course, please."

The people picked up the sweets and carried them to their mouths.

Several seconds of perfect silence later and they formed a circle and began a whispered conversation.

"Uh-, uhm, excuse me?"

Eventually a boy with glasses said this as representative.

"May we have you come to the royal palace right away?"

"...well, that will be all right, I suppose. Or rather, I suppose I have no right to say no."

When I reached the palace where I was transferred to I was told that this village, which had a monarchical system, would today see an end to the current lack of a monarch, which had caused the village whole to be in turmoil.

"Why would that be over?"

"Hail. That would be because you're going to be the new Queen."

The boy pushed towards me a cardboard box with the words "Regalia Inside" scribbled on the outside.



Regalia were super-important items that, when held, would make for proof of one being the ruler, but this very much in the mood of grumbling a rude-language comeback like *don'tcha put this stuff in a cardboard box!*

And so did our tale reach back to its beginning.

"...well, since I did incur you a damage, I cannot refuse, can I..."

"At present, our Southern Village is in strained relationships with the adjacent Northern Village. Exchange of goods has stopped, and we cannot even have villagers go back and forth between here and there. As far as what the Northerners say, we are in the upriver region, so up and doing works on the river for an additional waterwheel constitutes an inappropriate monopolization of water sources... well, of course there's no truth to that, it's simply what they say."

As he explained I keenly remembered how sure, there was this one time when I played at being the queen, right. And this time I had an opponent, right, went the sinister feeling that passed through my brain.

"Also, that according to ancient scriptures, because the town hall was in the Northern side, historically Southern was Northern possession. And that we had been procuring hunting guns and building military forces in order to threaten neighboring settlements. And that we've been covertly building weapons of mass destruction. They blame us for all kinds of things."

"...complaints that make for casus belli on parade, indeed."

"Yes, casus belli indeed. What the new Queen of the Northerners really aims for is control of both villages."

"The villages are both around the same size, so just talk back at them. You are equals, correct?"

The ministers' faces clouded.

"We can't, we have enough reasons to say we're being exploited. For example, at the moment there's no leaders in this village."

"And picking new people via elections is..."

"Impossible. There are requirements."

"Requirements?"

The youth pushed his glasses up his nose's bridge.

"Sweets, that is."

"Excuse me~?"

"In the past, there were many fairies living in this land."

"Ngh, does that perhaps mean that... when life gave you trouble you offered up sweets and had the fairies do something about it with their powers?"

"You are most wise, Your Majesty Queen. The most recent was several years ago, when the river overflowed and turned the land around it into inhospitable mud, which we had them fully rebuild."

"I did think those were much too new as far as this town's buildings went, so that was the reason why..."

"At the time, surprising as it may seem, there was a capable sweets artisan commanding the village."

"And where did they go?"

"He hit his age limit and retired. He lives with his own granddaughters, but in a land far away. If we had a master like that even now living among us, then I believe we could unilaterally overwhelm Northern..."

"I have heard enough. The tastier the sweets, the more fairies you can employ. And it was because of them that you reached a level of national power such as the one you once had, correct?"

"Marvelous! It's exactly as you say. Your Majesty's sweets were impressively delicious."

The ministers all prostrated themselves before me.

"We bid you please. Please help this village however you can."

They all said that together as one.

It was customary for a newly enthroned Queen to greet her respective in the other village. Because of that, a massive TV phone had been installed who knows in what generation to lie between rulers. It appeared it was a Hot Line.

"Can you see me?"

The Queen of the North, who appeared in the TV screen, took one look at me and tilted her head in puzzlement.

"Hummm? We've seen your face somewhere."

"I am the traveler that was near the hill, Your Majesty."

"Ohhh, that one!" And she clapped her hands. *"So you were enthroned. Wish We'd taken you along for questioning."*

"That I would beg to refrain from, however... by the way, madame Queen, a question if I may."

"Yes, do go ahead."

"This rumor that has it that you are searching for a reason to go to war, is it true?"

The all too blunt way I put it made the aide go pale for a moment.

On the other hand, the Queen smiled cattily.

"We are, how amusing. Let's fight, fair and square."

"So it is war you wish, Your Majesty."

"Indeed We do. We want territory. Also, just beyond your village there's another village. We want Southern Village also so We can expand into it in the near future."

Hers was a thirst for territorial possession.

"Because of that, and because We can't be patient about this anymore, We declare war!"

"We have no weapons, just how are we going to war?"

"We need no weapon! This fight will be won by they who make the tastiest sweets!"

"What are you talking about?"

"And I have inherited from my mother, who used to be a sweets maker, a secret technique!"

She was making merry all on her own.

"We shall see your power, see if you can resist our attacks at all!"

She thrust a scepter with a whipper (the froth-brewing kind) on top of it and spoke loftily.



War between South and North had broken out.

Which all led us to, how were we to proceed with this war?

Although war had been declared, a calm mood still made the rounds of the village. Stray sheep passed past lazily outside the imperial palace's windows.

"I suppose it would be better to think about some way of combating this... mister Prime Minister, what do we do?"

"Hmmm. I've no ideas at all regarding a war. I'd rather ask you for orders."

Besides the calm mood, a mood of putting it all on my shoulders was also all around.

The other ministers went *"if you need anything, please just call us!"*, took off their formal wear, and returned to farming, tools in hand.

"First of all, the day of the decisive battle will be tomorrow."

"Mh? What is the day of the decisive battle?"

"In the past, this land..."

To summarize the Prime Minister, things went like this.

Fairies did not show themselves before humans. However, once a year they imitated a human festival and made a great march inside the grasslands. Its path went through the hill that separated Northern with Southern (which was where I met the Queen of Northern). By laying sweets and written requests on that path beforehand, so long as the sweets were tasty, the wishes would be made true. Also, this custom existed in the Northern Village as well. The

end.

"Uh-huh. Does that not just mean that Northern and Southern are competing for the fairies?"

"It does indeed. And until the year before last, both parties healthily contested them, but..."

I understood. That was how this land went along with the fairies.

"Then things are simple when it comes to war, right? We only need to win the Contest of Sweets with the Northern Village on the day that the fairies parade, to put it."

"...I hope it will be that easy."

The Prime Minister spread a battle map on top of a large desk.

He calmly began drawing on it with a colored pencil.

...was he willing to do this, was he not...

"This is the major route of passage of fairies. Because last year we had no king or queen, we suffered a crushing defeat at the hand of the superior sweetmaking of Northern Village. This year was going to be it, we put our backs into it and decided to fight using quantity rather than quality, but we lost all those sweets."

"Ngh, I apologize..."

"If possible, we wish to use the presently limited ingredients to make the best, and the most bountiful, and most varied of sweets."

"I do wish we had in-season fruits, however..."

"They were used to the last. We can have more picked urgently, but delivery will be in two weeks."

"With that it will depend largely on our opponent's skills, still a victory appears difficult, indeed. Those people look like they have a fair bit of confidence in their skills, as well."

"Indeed they do. This is a problem. What do we do?"

In the past, when I had been exiled, I was able to grow a massive number of fairies and managed somehow.

But this time I did not need to increase them, already they had grown and in tremendous number.

"I have a good idea. It will be all right. We still have *that*."

I firmly declared that and returned to the lodge to triumphantly recover the fairy, but found that it had vanished along with the rest of them. He had eaten his fill of sweets and was satisfied, of course. The declaration of *ayup forget all that* I had to make to the Prime Minister was as embarrassing as my original declaration was firm.

The Prime Minister and I made a furlough outside the village. We were making a recce.

"Your Majesty, please be careful. The people of Northern Village are standing in the front lines right near the hill. If we're spotted we'll be subjected to pestering and annoyances, so there's a fair bit of danger."

"So this will end at us being pestered..."

"By the way, you said this was a recce, but what exactly are we reconnoitering?"

"The type of sweets that are being put out by our opponent."

As we approached the front line position of Northern Village we saw an unbelievable scene.

"More than a position, that... is a kitchen, is it not?"

The fluffy smoke that billowed from the smokestacks carried the scent of butter that had been passed through fire. They had ovens.

"This is bizarre. I do not recall that building being there a few days ago..."

Did they build a kitchen house overnight?

They did not. If there was any way of that being built, then there was only *that*.

"The power of the fairies, what else."

"Ridiculous. Miracles are only granted once a year. And only on the whole of tomorrow."

"Perhaps the Queen of Northern was the same as I..."

"Ah, their boss is right there."

The Prime Minister pointed.

The Northern Queen was leaving the kitchen house. Right after her, soldiers marched forwards holding great plates. The plates were full of baked sweets.

"You are done with your jobs, take your sweets and apple juice and return to the barracks. When fairies see soldiers they become more guarded, you see."

Without knowing that we were spying on them, the Queen cleared out the people.

"Waffles and scones. Also baked sweet potatoes, I see. All plain things, I suppose. The majority of those I suppose to be plain baked sweets."

"They look tasty."

"Being freshly baked magnifies tastiness, that it does."

I inquired whether a similar kitchen could be set up on the side of Southern Village, but the Prime Minister regretfully shook his head.

"A proper facility like that in a single night, well... I apologize."

"Right, that."

"Ah, the Queen is taking something out of her tent! Are those colored gum balls?"

"They are not, those are Rounded Up fairies."

With great effort she dragged out a wooden box filled up to the brim with Rounded Up fairies, which she then casually dumped all around the kitchen house. After them, despite the waste of freshly-baked scones that it was, she tossed them all around that well-growing thicket of grass.

"O fairies! Have your taste of sweets! Then build me a fashionable café in fairy size!"

After offering her supplication(?), she hid herself in the tall grass.

"How skilled! Done like that, fairies will work even for that man-eating Queen!"

What she had asked for happened not a minute later.

The fairies squirmed out of their ball form (thinking them as pillbugs doing the same makes it easy to understand, of course) and quickly realized that they were surrounded by sweets.

"Ahhh, there's something, mebbe, something!" "What-what, this is a nice scent!" "It's steaming hot..."

There was not a trace of questions such as where they were or how did they get there. Fairies were simple beings, so they rushed to the closest scones and stuffed their cheeks like squirrels.

"...feels like we gotta do a job?"

And so they gradually remembered the order given when they were Rounded Up and began working in earnest.

The fairies woke up one after another.

"That was a good 'un!" "Dunno who or what made it, though!" "Do we repay their kindness?"

"With a flavor like that, we gotta do a brisk job of it!"

The number of workers increased and progress on the job accelerated suddenly.

"Ohhh, Your Majesty! A building is being constructed before our very eyes!"

You did ever see a video put in fast-forwards, correct? That was how it looked like.

What they made was miniature-sized open café that the fairies could use. It was a vast build that could sit hundreds of fairies.

"I understand. This is their marketing, and they are going to talon-grab the hearts of fairies

with freshly-baked sweets and a classy café."

Having inferred that the work of the fairies was done, the Queen threw something else at them.

"Now what did she throw?"

"That's a type of fireworks that makes popping sounds when it hits the floor."

Called pinwheels, when lit and tossed they made popping sounds as they revolved, and last they would make an even louder pang.

"Wah! "Eek!" "Mai Gad!" "HaPuhn!"

Running away confused (but still unable to fully escape), by the last pang the near totality of fairies had returned to ball form. Only a scant few escaped.

"Fufufu, witness Our daring trick!"

The Queen calmly returned to the place and went recovering the Rounded Up fairies.

"...unbelievable, that she would abuse fairies like this when they should grant us a miracle only once a year!"

"This is how high the odds of her victory is, then."

"And since there's no possible way we would win, then...?"

"No, that is not quite correct. We still have a hope."

Matching that line I slowly opened my palm and found a fairy there, one that had managed by luck to escape, shivering visibly.

Brought back to the palace, I treated the escaped fairy. Then I bared my heart to him.

"Mister fairy~, are you we~ll?"

"Huh, I'm middle-of-the way, is that OK?"

The (plainly put) middle-tense fairy had recovered enough that he was puttering about doing housework in the dollhouse allocated to him (via village housing quota).

"A-, amazing, I can't believe you've tamed a fairy like this..."

"Hoh hoh hoh..."

It felt nice to be praised.

"But with just one of them, the situation won't improve, won't it."

"No, there is not just one of them."

I took a six colored macaron that I had prepared earlier, stuffed it into a teensy little bag, and gave it to the fairy.

"What's this?"

"Present for you!"

The fairy peeked inside the paper bag.

The moment he did, pop, went the cork-style sound effect.

"Waaah, lookie heeere!" "Lookie here, there's a tasty thing!"

"Wah, they increased!," went the Prime Minister, surprised.

"Fairies increase in number like this. Now then, misters fairi~es, I would like strawberries, I do~. Mind, I will make you one of the many new sweets I could make with strawberries~!"

Schlp, and drool dangled from the edges of the fairies' mouths.

"Leave it all to us!" "Wait here for little less than an hour!"

The fairies, happy now that they had a macaron, sung hey-poh-hey-poh (a mysterious song) as they force-grew the strawberries in a planter.

"J-, just seven of them? But with this..."

"That is because there are two of them. But for now seven will be enough. Now then, as for what I could make with these..."

What I made was a strawberry cupcake. Those too I quickly reinvested or rather re-sweet-
ested in fairies.

"Weee!" "Weee!" "Weee!" "Weee!"



Po-po-po-pop. With a pleasant sound they split into four.

"They increased again... could it be that this is a game where every goal doubles the
previous..."

The scale was such that it shocked even the Prime Minister.

What was left was simply to follow the flow of things.

"Misters fairi~es, I would like cocoa see~ds!"

"Let's do this!"

Po-po-po-po-pop.

"Misters fairi~es, I would like liquo~r!"

"Yes-yees!"

Poro-po-po-pop!

"Misters fairi~es, I would like this and I would like that!"

"Ah-yeah!"

Poro-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-pop!

It took, well, about five hours.

As population increased so did the additions to the building, and at this point, the floor of the
kings' quarters had become a dollhouse so vast and packed it was a puzzle where to even
put one's feet.

"We have really rebuilt this to be a kingdom of fairies."

"This is preposterous..."

The Prime Minister's eyes kept being wide.

"Now departing from Kings' Quarters to Front of Toilet, please board on platform one!"

They even had trains.

"We're totally in an economic downturn?" "Ain't we!" "Gimme some grape juice!" "If only I had
a job, I could do something about all this garbage!" "Flags! Flags!"

They also had what appeared to be a slum.

"Now then, the layout will take time, so it is about the right moment to begin preparations."

And so came the time when the Northern and Southern Queens faced each other. The populations of each of their villages watched them with unease on their faces. "Southern Queen, it looks like that Our relationship, as extended among a long time, has at last reached its finale."

"Our relationship started just a day ago."

Here'm I too, what a queue, somebody announced at a loud voice.

The Northern Queen rushed into her kitchen house, and I into my galley facility as just build (by fairies). I already had a large number of subordinates waiting for me.

"We are going to start with the freshly baked sweets."

The Prime Minister took my orders and efficiently conveyed them to the people. Just-baked goods were carried out one after the other.

"So, what do you all think?"

The line of fairies actually surpassed the thousand.

They spotted the mountains brimming with sweets on their path, split up into two large groups, each going after one of them.

"Waaah!" "Eeek!" "Amazing!" "The master humans have sweets for us!"

Counting their numbers, the Prime Minister reported that we were about equal. But the equality lasted an instant considering the banquet the fairies were making of our Southern food.

"Awww, a massive number of fairies went into the classy café!"

A victorious face came to the Northern Queen.

"Now then, we are open here!"

"PLAYGROUND CAFE', OPEEEEEEN!"

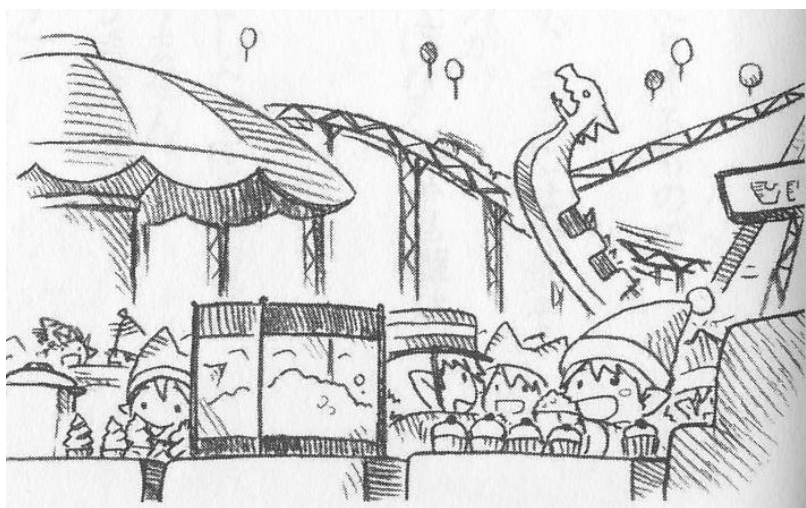
It was our secret weapon, it had been covered by a large tarp until then.

A fairy-sized playground that filled to the brim one side of the grassy plain was revealed to the rays of the sun.

"What's that?" "Can't imagine?" "Still I have a premonition it'll be fun?"

The fairies in the mountain of sweets stopped their hands as they were eating and saw it.

In the park there were already fairies as attendants and as shill audience, playing with the miniature roller coaster, the miniature buffet, and the fun-sized teacups ride.



"About time to come out with our second bullet!"

The Prime Minister gave orders and whipped cream, teensy cakes, and popcorn, of course all fairy-sized, were carried in by the train and unloaded from its cargo wagons.

The introduction of new sweets shifted a majority of fairies to the Southern side.

"Eighty percent, that's how many we got!"

"Looks like the fight is won."

Incidentally, this playground continued straight into the King's Quarters. It had been expanded through the land from there.

"W-, w-, what is THAAAAT?!"

As we were enjoying the victors' teatime, the Northern Queen rushed into the galley, shouting.

"An amusement park café for fairy use."

"I can tell that at a glance! How did you create it!"

"State secret."

"NggghRgggh! Very well, if that's how it's going to be...!"

Returning back to her kitchen house, she scattered the Rounded Up fairies, her secret weapon, all over the Northern side. One of the balls that rolled around lightly hit our northern exterior wall.

"Bwaaah-haaah! Northern Village is trying to swallow Southern Village! Let's invade them!"

The man tossed out the remaining sweets plates while crying loudly.

"T-, that may be... not a good thing, maybe?"

One thing led to another and the fairies sort of ended up responding forcefully to the cry of people's hearts.

In the beginning, it was quiet.

But soon the ground began slowly shaking, which then became all of a sudden as strong as an earthquake, furthermore the air itself started shaking and that shake transmitted like a pulsation. This was the power of the fairies.

Our eyes caught the instant that the Northern fortified wall, which blended into the background, began without any logical coherence to abruptly lift itself like the head of a snake.

Somebody shouted.

The Northern fortifications multiplied like a cell subdividing itself as it pushed towards us. It was understandable that people would begin shaking while seeing the massively-built citadel come to attack like a tsunami.

"Y-, Your Majesty, what kind of phenomenon is that?"

"I surmise that it may be Northern Village coming to swallow Southern Village."

"...isn't that a problem?"

"Hummm, when things get like this I can usually predict what the punchline is going to be, but... I will do something about it."

I shouted at the fairies with a megaphone.

"Fairiiies, if we do nothing then Southern Village will be eaten by Northern Village! If you do something about it, a vast number of cream puffs will drop by to visit you!"

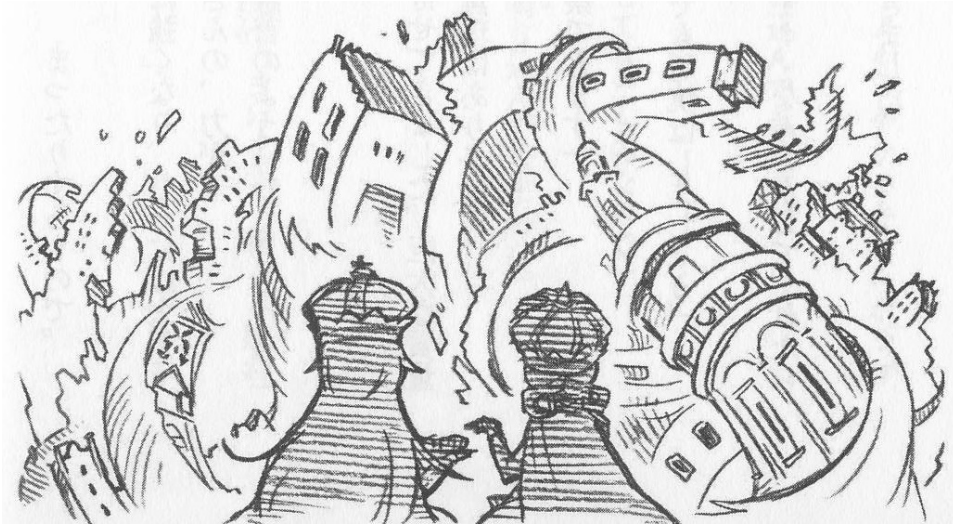
All the fairies turned back towards me at precisely the same time.

Taking Northern and Southern people with us, we distanced ourselves from the reciprocal attack of the villages, witnessing it from far away.

The Marchen-style townscape of South Village stood resolute against the crawling of Northern Village. The varicolored Marchen village rose up to the crawling fortress like an embankment.

"What else to expect when fairies are these many, they work really fast, huh."

"Just what in blazes do you think you are doing!," went the Northern Queen (now a POW).
Smash, and with that onomatopoeia the two villages attacked each other.



They both looked like slimes made of buildings, and the battle took the form of an attempt at absorbing the other side.

White and pink walls mixed with each other, making swirls like in coffee milk art. Building fused with building to the point where it would have been impossible to take them apart, and one house *ba-doom ba-doom* germinated like it was incessantly cross-blending in both crass and beautiful ways. Once the Rococo temple, growing haphazardly like alfalfa, gripped up the stoutly built fortress, it entrapped the ashen watchtowers in beautiful arches.

I apologize for it being hard to visualize all this.

Right, please imagine it as something gross like two funguses born in the same spot attacking each other with their right to life on the line, except vastly accelerated.

There was no sign that this battle of fusion by the cities themselves would end on this ground shaking so hard.

"It appears this will drag long, so let us have tea. I even have some cake left."

"As you command. Let's make some for everyone."

Being now neither Northerners nor Southerners, everyone there in that place enjoyed some bottled tea.

Her shoulders still slumped, the Northern Queen sat down hard on the ground and whispered this.

"So you can make lemon tarts... give Us one."

"Yes, help yourself."

Second hour of the battle. The literal fight between town and town ended in the shape of a double knockout.

Together with that, the war between North and South found its end with nothing settled.

...on that day, what were once Northern and Southern Villages changed their name into Melange Village.

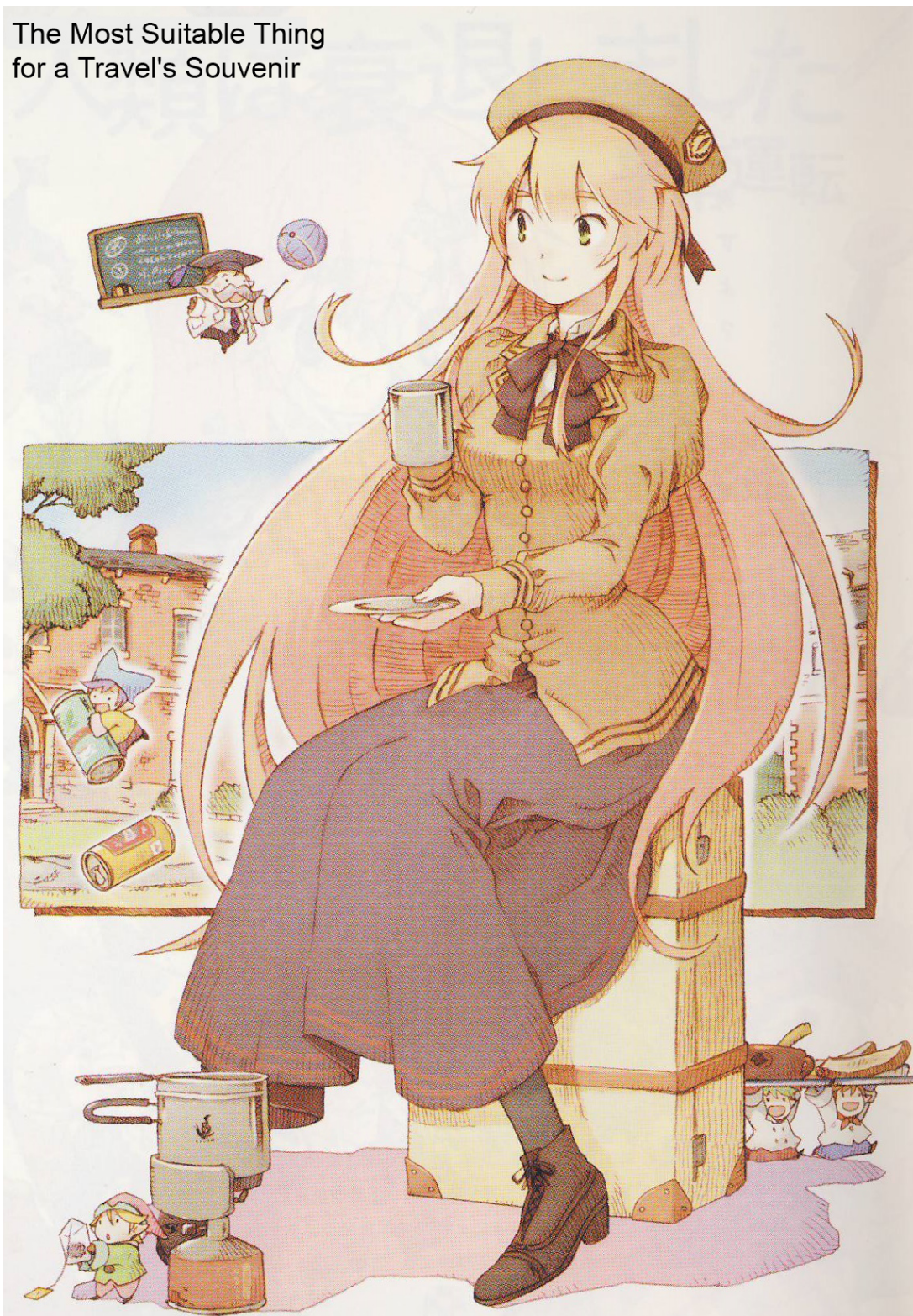
Melange is a term used with sweets with the meaning of *mixing*. The towns are now

something like gelatins fused into each other then solidified, vaunting a terrifying state of chaos that makes for a queer scene that's appropriate for its name. A messy, splitchy-splotched townscape that could only startle any visitor, it could be put in one term as "avant-garde". In particular, the 50 meters tall and 20 meters wide natural high-rise arch, which can only be described as a frozen land tsunami, is the pride of this village.

Should you pass close to Melange Village, I could definitely not say that it would be good policy to miss out on the chance of starting out a journey into the fantastic.

Excerpt from *The Human Habitation Guidebook*, page 192

The Most Suitable Thing
for a Travel's Souvenir



Only that facility alone had survived within that grassy plain.

Grass grew luscious and wild around it, covering thoroughly the foundations and broken pillars, which showed that there used to be a city there, once. There was only one facility that kept to the shape that it used to have had a long time in the past.

A tall stone fence surrounded quite the vast expanse of terrain. There were a few buildings within the encirclement, and it gave the impression that somebody was still living there.

I passed the gate and entered the first building to find a receptionist's counter there.

"...is there anyone he~re?"

There was no response, but I did find a bell on top of a piece of paper with *ring if you need anything* written on it.

A moment after ringing it, a woman wearing a suit came out.

"Here I am! What do you need?"

...what is this feeling, like I had seen this before?

"I have a question, this was a village, correct? It does not appear that it survived, however."

"A village we are, furthermore a school, something like that?"

"Huuuh, a school, are you. But chronologically speaking there are no educational facilities anymore, is that correct?"

"That's correct, but that's where we decided to make something surprising."

And what surprise does she say this is?

"Say, milady, did you want to enroll?"

She said that with a fluffy tone that would not settle on an accent.

"I did not, I am a traveler in fact, can I still visit?"

"Traveler... you want to lodge, sleep, stopover tonight?"

"Those all mean the same things. Still, yes, I would like to. I do think that I would wish to do so, if possible."

If I could not stop over here tonight, then I had a problem, because I was otherwise going to have to sleep out in the wilderness.

"Then of course you must enroll?"

"Huh? Enroll?"

"It's the droll."

"Droll?"

"...little mistake. I meant the rule."

"So if I am to stop over, I must enroll?"

"We only have the student's dormitory, so that's how it goes."

"Ahhh, it is a student's dormitory... that is why."

"Yes yessity-yes yes."

I had been sleeping out in the wilds for some time, so stopping here for a few days would be refreshing... well then.

"Will you, then, enroll?"

"...I must say that I have already been to school. And besides, I am a little hesitant to become a student at my age."

"Everybody says that."

"Everybody, do you mean all the travelers visiting here?"

"They come around at times."

"So what does everybody do?"

"They leave?"

"...indeed, I see."

"What will you do?"

I was hesitant.

I wanted to sleep over, but did not want to enroll. Awww, what was I to do...

"Ngh!"

There I realized:

that if I wanted to leave, then I could always up and leave.

And because of that...

"We're adding a new friend to all of you?"

"...is my name. I look forwards to being in your care."



I wore an uniform at a dash and gave my salute from the teacher's platform.

The number of students was 10, male and female.

Although there was some difference in age, the students generally went from 8 to 11 years old.

At over 20 I was firmly in the category of Teacher.

"Excuse me... aren't you... an adult?"

A frail-looking girl sitting in the front row asked me that.

"That may be how it looks like. But I am a student."

"Despite being an adult...?"

"My recommendation is to get along~."

Leaving just that said, the business suit lady unsteadily walked away.

That was the moment in which a person that did not leave me the slightest feeling of being a fellow human had left.

...I should be more like her, doing the absolute minimum to fit into the background, then leaving.

"Where may I sit?"

I asked one of the boys, and he almost reflexively pointed towards a seat in the very back row.

"Thank you for everything, may I say that?"

I addressed the boy in the seat in front of me, but he kicked off his seat and took off. He joined a group of students in the corner of the classroom, which were shooting glances at me as they whispered to each other, and he told them with some depression that I had just tried to talk to him.

Awww, groups of young children always felt like this, did they. It took me back.

And there I went, thinking that this could become quite interesting in its own way.

The facility was quite well maintained for something that stood in the middle of a field of wild grass.

There was nearly none of said wild grass growing in the area surrounded by fences, and the building, for being old and occasionally dotted by visible red bricks, was evidently well cared for. The wilderness outside of it seemed like it belonged to a different world. I could not avoid being reminded of The School, which was similar in atmosphere. This one was a fair bit smaller, however.

Looking down at the pavement laid down near the entrance of the school building I saw a pattern like a crown of laurels, perhaps indicating the glory of old days. It may have been possible that this had been a school of some tradition far in the past.

"Excuse me, milady... I have shown all that there was to be shown around here, you see? May I leave?"

There were no more than three girls in the class, and I had basically captured the shiest (and easiest to manipulate) one to show me around.

"Leave for where, the dormitory?"

"Sure..."

"I am sleeping over there as well, so that can make for the last thing I have you show me."

"Aw!"

The girl became teary-eyed. She did not want anyone to see her with me.

It was after school at that moment. Something could be done as far as showing me around the school building, but avoiding the gazes of her classmates at the dormitory's entrance was going to be difficult. Witnessing her acting nicely with the odd one out (me) was quite the outrageous heresy for a tightly-knit group, heh heh heh.

"Come now, come, take me to the dormitory too, please."

"Ngggggghhh..."

The dormitory was a wooden building, and also well-maintained for being so old.

"C-, can we go through the back entrance...?"

"N-o. This is the first time so we shall resolutely enter from the front entrance."

"Ng-, ngggh..."

Soon as the girl had finished groaning a throaty moan, she suddenly stopped her feet.

It appeared that I had driven her too far up the wall, and as I thought it was perhaps time to let her go free, I was shouted at with a vigorous voice.

"Hey! Why are you with that one!"

The girl's shoulders twitched with a start.

"If you're hanging around her, then we're no longer friends!"

"I-, I'm not...!"

A determined boy appeared from the back of the entrance hall, and the girl sweatily made excuses.

"Come!," and the girl walked quickly up to him, as ordered. The boy made a relieved face on seeing the girl obey him.

Uh-huh.

"...say, you gonna tell everyone about this?"

"I ain't telling on you, it'd be another set of pain in the rear. Just, if you keep hanging around her, then as class president I'm gonna have to report that to everybody else."

The girl began shaking.

"I won't do it anymore! So will you not tell on me to anyone, pleeease?"

"...it's fine. I won't tell anyone."

The girl instantly switched to a cheerful face.

"T-, thank you~!"

"...pfui. It's a special favor just for you."



Uh-huh. Uhhh-huuuh.

I gazed in with interest and the boy, noticing my stare, once again made a stern face.

"What the hell're you staring it!"

"Well, my. Your uniform marks you as dignified, but using words like that will make your parents sad, you see."

"Stuuu-pid! Ain't got no parents!"

"Oh dear. My apologies."

"Say, you there. Never yank her to yourself ever again. So maybe you're an adult, but you're the new one, don't go gettin' carried away!"

After saying all he had to say, the two left.

Determined Boy and Shy Girl were a couple that left me with some impression.

That night, in a single room of the dormitory enveloped by long-sought-after brand new sheets, I had a happy, calm sleep.

When I woke up I found that an ID card had been posted in my letterbox, which was one of those assigned to each individual room. It proved I was a student. It appeared that this village managed everything with that card.

That morning I had breakfast at the dining hall.

Passing the card in the distribution machine dispensed breakfast in the mornings and dinner

in the evenings.

On that, today's menu consisted of bread with raspberry jam, a sauté of mystery meat (maybe synthetic) and fake-sea turtle soup. Dessert was vanilla-flavored rice pudding. Marvelous.

"Maybe it will be fine if I stop over for a few more days..."

The children were having their meal packed like a school of fish into a location far from me, so I was left all alone, but sitting before this filling breakfast meant I did not mind in the slightest.

The very first thing that shocked me about the school was how there were no teachers.

They were not resting from a bout of illness or anything, there were none to begin with. It was a shuddersome permanent self-study class.

Despite that, the curriculum was firmly set.

It appeared that the students were to learn by themselves following the educational plan delineated on the prepared study book. Would they actually be able to learn like that, I wondered? It was not really my problem, but...

For there being no teacher, study support was on the dot.

There was a decent library, a study room, an entertainment room, three square meals a day, uniforms, study supplies offered free, and the building was clean. Marvelous.

They even held proper class advancement exams.

How advancement was decided without any reference to actual age was the same as The School.

And that exam was administered to me on my second day after enrollment.



"...what exactly is this?"

Glancing at the questions, the recurring feeling in my chest was perplexity.

Math problems, do your best now♪

Q1: $27+17 = []$

Q2: With $y=5x+6$, if $x=3$, what is the value of y ?

Q3: Can a simply-connected 3D closed manifold be said to be isomorphic to a 3D S^3 sphere?

Even setting aside how a basic arithmetic operation can be presented followed by a linear

function, that next question left me with a big question mark.

Solving the other problems in the span of five minutes, I set out on this third question.

I could not solve it. It was hard. Reeeally hard.

The more I thought the worse this felt. I found the problem relentless, as filling out this blank space was could not even be attempted via trial-and-error, in the end I thus gave up. It did not even appear solvable with human skills.

...this was a problem so hard it felt like death, was it not?

In the break after the test I tried asking the children what they answered, and...

"Awww, I couldn't do question 3!" "Same. What was that about?" "The usual thing, right?"

"Yeah, a problem that doesn't look like it could be solved." "More importantly, the next Japanese test looks nasty." "Say, did you study for it?" "Nope, did nothing of the sort!"

What to say, as expected?

'Problems that don't look like they could be solved' were also witnessed in the exams that followed.

A question about foreign language suddenly appeared in the Japanese exam, and a question about the molecular structure of proteins showed up in what should have been a beginner's science exam, they showed up like they were mistakes of some sort. More importantly, they appeared as one or two questions per subject, the majority was answerable with general scholarship. No need to say it, had humans made these exams, errors of this sort would not occur.

...no need to say it, there was something lurking behind them.

As obvious given the difference in age, I stole the Number One Student's laurels. Yes, stole. What I did could be appropriately described as such. I received the faint praise of a prize for getting nearly full points in every subject, got praised on the blackboard, and even got promoted on the spot.

I was the MVP Foreigner.

There was no need to say how my position in the class became quite odd.

"The new girl, can't stand 'er." "Yeah, she's the worst. And despite how she's an adult."

"Literally Miss Bright Future." "So, what're you gonna do as class rep? Gonna let a stranger do what she likes?"

Eyes filled with expectations pointed at him by his classmates, Determined Boy came out with this.

"Ain't gonna. If she keeps getting carried away like this, then I won't mind resorting to Operation: Prankster."

...I did not feel particularly threatened, but a life of being whispered about behind the back from the moment I went to school to the moment I went to bed was indeed tiresome.

Which all led to me shifting towards making allies.

My pet theory was that, to make an ally, one had to be broad-minded.

Did you know? Humans that know the distinction between good and evil are capable of using magic.

"You like that girl, do you."

Magic words.

Called over behind the school building, I whispered them to just the two of us.

Of course, Determined Boy and his class leader-like character would come out with words of rejection. He could do nothing less. But I still had many more magic words. Like, "you should tell her," and "tell everyone else in the class, just to test the waters," all magic words like that.

Eventually, Determined Boy hung his head.

"...d-, don't... tell anyone... I beg you..."

And so, classroom next day felt like this.

"I still can't stand the new girl." "Yeah, she's really the worst." "Miss Bright Future, as I said."

"So, what're you gonna do as class rep? Still gonna let a stranger do what she likes?"

Eyes filled with expectations pointed at him by his classmates, Determined Boy muttered this.

"...ah... no... wait... it's all about the right moment, you know... the thing..."

And so it was that I secured days of tranquility.

My next move after securing tranquil days was to understand the real situation.

"...what do you mean by 'real situation'?"

Shy Girl, whom I had once again in the role of guide thanks to my barter with Determined Boy, frailly asked that simple question.

"I mean the environment that surrounds me in the present situation."

"Environment?"

"Where does the food come from and where is it prepared at, do you not think all that to be curious?"

"What... but that's just what we cultivate, right?"

There certainly existed, in this school's curriculum, classes rooted in real-life farming and animal rearing (despite being still self-study...). Instruction on the matter was of course vital in the current age.

Except...

"Those are just the teaching tools, you see, just the teaching tools. They are not remotely enough."

The field that the students cultivated was, I could firmly say, not big enough to sustain their own needs. As if this environment that had no adults around except for Miss Business Suit, this place that was sealed away, surrounded as it was by wilderness, could ever practice enough farming activity to sustain itself.

I believed there was only one answer.

"Milady, that's a vending machine, you know? What are you gonna do?"

My eyes fixed on a drinks vending machine operated by ID card as installed in the corridor. The school's students could freely drink canned tea and other soft drinks from those vending machines installed in good number inside the premises. Free of charge, of course. Given the usual pattern, this was the very first kind of thing that I had to be suspicious about.

"I think I will try disassembling it."

"You can't do that... they'll get angry."

"Who?"

"The people, you know, of the school?"

"And do those people exist at all?"

"What, but they do. The one with the business suit, for example..."

"That one will not say anything. That is because she is only there to deal with people from outside. Is there anyone else?"

Shy Girl remained in silence.

For being a school it had no teachers, for being a village there were no adults.

"I just need to make sure of something. I will put it back to how it was right away."

"I don't think you can do that if you disassemble it..."

"I do not expect that will be a problem. Not as long as I foresee a certain trick."

"D-, did you just say foresee?"

No matter how hard I examined it, I could not find any screws or joints on the vending machine. It did not appear possible to disassemble at all.

"If the vending machines are a no-go, then the school cafeteria will have to do."

"Ah... wait..."

I decided to move to the cafeteria and investigate the meal-serving machine.

"No clues here as well, then."

The kitchenette was a perfectly sealed block, and first of all one could not go behind the cooking machine. The kitchen machine itself was covered by a thick wall, and no door existed that allowed going in or out the kitchenette in the first place. The prepared food was automatically pushed out of a small window on the counter.

I tried going outside and seeing if there was a back door that led from the school building's exterior into the kitchen machine, but no such thing existed either.

"Do you have no suspicions about this, either?"

"What, but after all, things come out when the ID is passed on it... I say there's got to be someone..."

Children with no inquisitiveness, these.

"How did you people get into this school in the first place?"

"Long ago, us children with no parents were being raised in a church, then a flier came in..."

"I want to hear about that in detail."

"I have heard. This school intentionally drew in the children without parents from the villages nearby, is that correct?"

Miss Business Suit listened to my words across the reception's counter in silence.

"Worse, you intentionally put the fliers out only to the authorities involved. So, why did you do that? This is neither entertainment nor time-wasting, there must be a reason, no? And that reason, could it be..."

I stretched an arm towards the unresponsive Miss Business Suit.

She leaned forwards still in her chair across the counter.

She fell off of the chair the instant I put my hand on her shoulder.

Thunk, and together with that dry sound, what used to be Miss Business Suit scattered around on the floor.

She was a simple mannequin, the type that parts like arms and legs could be attached or removed.

I was momentarily at a loss for words.

I eventually realized that I had not rang the call bell before trying to talk to her.

In the curriculum there was, for some reason (and frankly quite expectably), a sweets-making class.

This despite there being a separate class for cooking, do you see?

In the dedicated cooking room, complete with a proper-looking oven, the students had dark faces all as one.

"...another hard question's come through. Chocolate cake this time."

"Ugh." "That's a hard one..." "Why, it's been allways cakes of late."

Determined Boy announced that after checking the assignment on the notice board, and everybody else made at once a reeeal groaner of a noise.

"Say, was there a recipe?" "Yup. Was in the library, so I just brought it with." "Ingredients seem to be all here, as usual." "But me, I'm no good at making cakes." "But, yanno, I've been having a streak of low scores on exams, if I don't do this I'll fail out."

It looked like they were somewhat worried.

"Is it a problem if we switch it for something simple like biscuits or scones?"

One of the boys asked that and, hesitant about whether it was proper to talk to me, glanced towards Determined Boy. Receiving a *yeah, go ahead an' tell 'er* with the chin, the boy relaxed and talked to me about this.

"In the beginning, it was like that and it was scored highly, see. But the difficulty level of the assignments has risen recently, and scones alone aren't cutting it."

"Uh-huh, this is certainly demanding a whole cake, is it."

"Us two, we've failed to get promoted twice already."

Shy Girl said that.

"What do we do... if we fail again, it'll get nasty, won't it?" "Sure, we could just make it by following the recipe." "Do you girls get how to do this?" "Just because we're girls doesn't mean we can make the difficult stuff." "Besides, we're only learning to do the same thing..."

"If you would like, I could teach you how to do it, what do you say?"

All the gazes gathered on me.

They had become earnest gazes.

"S-, so you can make this sort of stuff?"

"How to put it... easy-peasy?"

The ingredients were abundant, so the sweets we made were also in great number.

A few we helped ourselves to, but as it seemed the rest would just be disposed of...

"Put them on this tray and push them down back there. You'll quickly see the result."

What was said Determined Boy carried out.

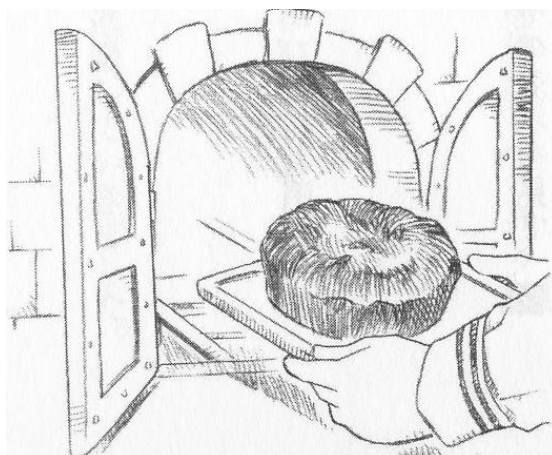
"Result?"

"Sweets cooking practice is judged each individual time. That's the result I mean."

The hole was called a mouse hole. That was because it resembled the holes that mice made in the walls. Size was such that not even a child could squeeze through, but it had its own tiny doors.

We opened the heavy iron doors and I saw that it led into a dark cave.

There was a rail on the bottom side.



The sweets on the tray were as if inhaled into the wall in the blink of an eye.

"When you close the door on them like this, the teachers off somewhere give their evaluations."

"So there are teachers?"

"There should be. Never seen 'em, though..." and Determined Boy slumped his shoulders.

"The rumor is that the teachers are sickly and being kept under medical guard somewhere deep in the school building."

So even Shy Girl believed that explanation.

There are indeed none, perhaps, went my whispering, which vanished into the shouting of the students looking over us.

"Now what is going on?"

"We got an A+! An A+! This is the first time!"

The electric bulletin board near the ceiling shone brightly. The students were making a bustle after looking at it.

"Our best has always been a B!" "The harder the sweet to make, the harder it is to get a good grade, amazing!" "This means we all advance grades together, doesn't it?"

"This is some bustle. How come?"

"...these days, our sweets-making class hasn't gone well, see. At the start they were easy so we got loads of points, but these days nobody's been able to advance grades."

"Well then."

"An A+, incredible... with this, we'll be skipping grades for real..."

Things developed as foreseeable.

I was able to clear all kinds of tests in a very short time, and jumped to the next grades at once. In particular, I had no issue in sweets-making and managed to keep my grade average at a constant A.

The odd part of this school was not that it was only self-study, but how tests for advancement were held separate for each applicant, so if one had the study capacity for it, well, then one could apply to them in succession. This was a sloppiness in the system, a point I expected a human manager would be certainly able to find problematic.

Then, a mere two weeks later...

...I was in the highest grade.

"Nee-san, let's drink some tea together." "Let's do some sports together, nee-san." "Nee-chan, let's make a quilt." "Let's dance!" "Let's tend the garden!" "Let's write a book!" "Onee-chan!" "Nee-san!" "Ane-go!"

All right, so I became popular.

My, our dearest children, soon as you show them a good part of you they immediately respect you, what scaredy little ani... ahem... how sincere and adorable.

"Or rather, I have been residing here for two weeks already..."

Life in a dormitory took me back, much like the morning bed I was now accustomed to I did not quite want to leave.

"Onee-chan, I'm gonna bake a cake, teach me how!"

I was grumbling in my room when Shy Girl came to find me.

"All right, then let us move to the cooking room."

In the cooking room I held a lecture on how to bake a cake, and then I moved to the corridor's vending machine to have a drink.

"...lately the number of drinks on offer has increased, right onee-chan."

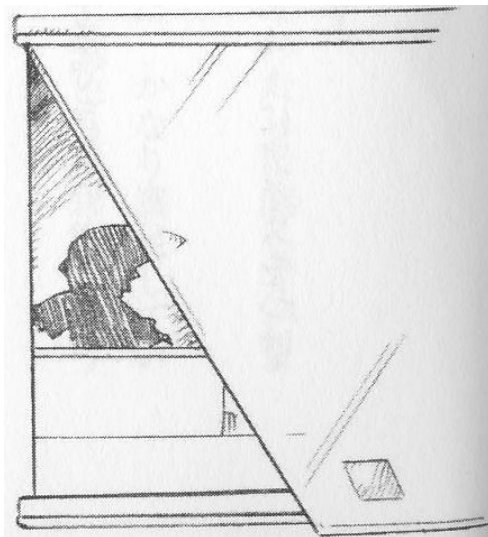
"I am wondering, why, is it not because the quality of sweets has improved."

"How does that work?"

"Well..."

I tried peeking inside the vending machine from the drink dispensing slot.

I glimpsed a scene of a tiny figure darting about deep within the machine.



But that was all. He would not come out.

"Hum, no good, as expected."

"Sometimes I see you looking around for things, onee-chan."

"I am searching for fairies."

Perhaps she thought it a joke, as Shy Girl giggled.

Even at this point I had had no direct acquaintance with the fairies of this location. I could not quite construct a proper situation, and they remained shy and did not show themselves to me. Which all meant, of course, that the students at this school had never witnessed a fairy. Had they met one there it would have created a big bustle, I expected, and, not liking that sort of thing, they would conversely be increasingly vigilant and prudent.

A vicious cycle, perhaps, or a who-even-knows, perhaps.

"Regardless, so long as we make tasty sweets, life in this school will be peaceful, that is what it all means."

"Say, how about you don't teach just me, but everyone else?"

"That will do just fine. Particularly given how there are no rules against a student taking the role of teacher."

Truthfully, that was perhaps the correct way of thinking about this.

Since at present I was unable to directly contact the fairies, my interest at present had shifted towards the direction this school was going into.

"Wah, then I'll tell everyone!"

I could lecture on studying, on housework, and on sweets-making. I could raise everyone's grades, allow them to advance grades, and lead them all the way to the end. But what laid after that?

It would have been nice to be able to get out without leaving a bad impression behind, too.

But if I could not, then I could only get to the bottom of this all in my stay here.

It would not be a bad thing if this honeymoon between fairies and children was to continue.
...well, perhaps.

After that, I bequeathed all the children with the means to make delicious sweets.
The growth of the students was remarkable, and even those who stood out for being behind the rest became capable, one after the other, to complete their assignments.
"I was finally able to regain positions after I was so far in the back~." "Looks like I'm dodging failing the grade this time..." "I thought I would be the only student not to graduate~."
Voices of gratitude reached me, which further upped my willingness to teach.
As if I would let anyone fall behind, I all but said as I threw in my sure-fire recipes. I adapted my recipes when ice cream appeared among the assignments, putting my heart whole on taking the fairies by surprise.
What I did quickly became popular, and the other students also began imitating me.
The Pâtisserie skill of this group was reaching a decent level... or that was how it felt like to me.

The fairies had been having frugal (?) meals for a long time. I expected this recent leveling up of sweets to satisfy them quite a bit. As proof, the facilities at the school became more beautiful day after day, with the scene changing its gloss into that of a water-color painting. All without humans seeing anyone acting to make it so, of course.

And then, on the forty-fifth day since my enrollment, this occurred.

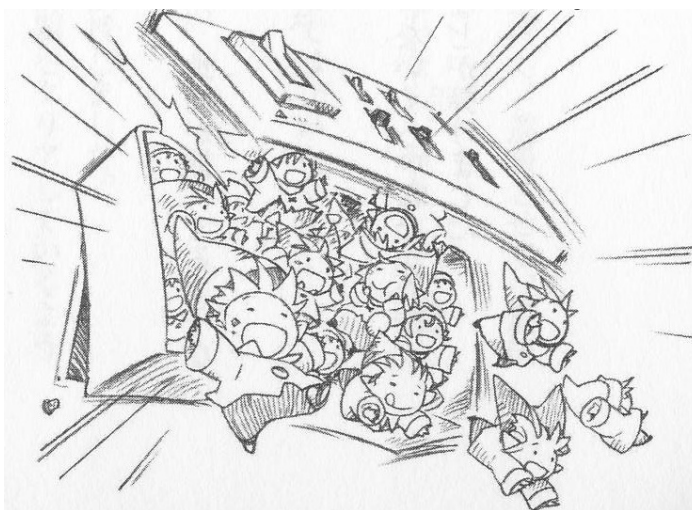
It happened right after we slid the plate with the sweets we students had made during sweets period into the mouse hole.

The school whole began shaking.

"Huh, am I shaking?" "No, it's the school building that's shaking, no?" "I say no. I get the feeling it's the ground that's shaking." "They call it an earthquake, don't they?"

The students were shaking at the unusual experience. Suddenly the bulletin board lit up and, "WE ARE SATISFIEEEEEEEEEED!!!"

As the shaking kept increasing, when eventually we reached the point where we could not stand up straight, what I suspected would be every single machine / device / vending machine / cooking utensil / switchboard / more in the whole school blasted open.



Yes, they did indeed, they blasted open.

The fairies that overflowed so explosively promptly covered the floor whole.

The fairies became a violent torrent and eventually flowed out of the windows.

All of them to the last man had a fulfilled face.

"Delicious!" "To the point it's awesomely so!" "Feeling HIGH TENSION!!!" "We're overflowing!"

"Mehbe!" "Thanks!" "My whole body was at stake!" "Goodbye's!" "See ya!" "Until some other day, some other time!" "Thanks for the dream!" "Thanks for the goodies!" "Bye!"

This was a custom of the fairies that I was used to. But it appeared to have had an impact on the children.

"Wah! What is all this, what!" "There's so many! There's so many little men!" "I'm being swept away!" "Eeek! Monsters! Eeek!"

I would surmise that their numbers off in their secret rooms had been dwindling due to not-particularly-tasty sweets. And thanks to my intervention, they multiplied explosively.

"T-, the magnificent if usual pattern...!"

The torrential force swept me away as well.

The next thing I knew was that I was laying face down outside the site of the school building.

The fairies were in much too much high spirits. They felt like stirred-up butter.

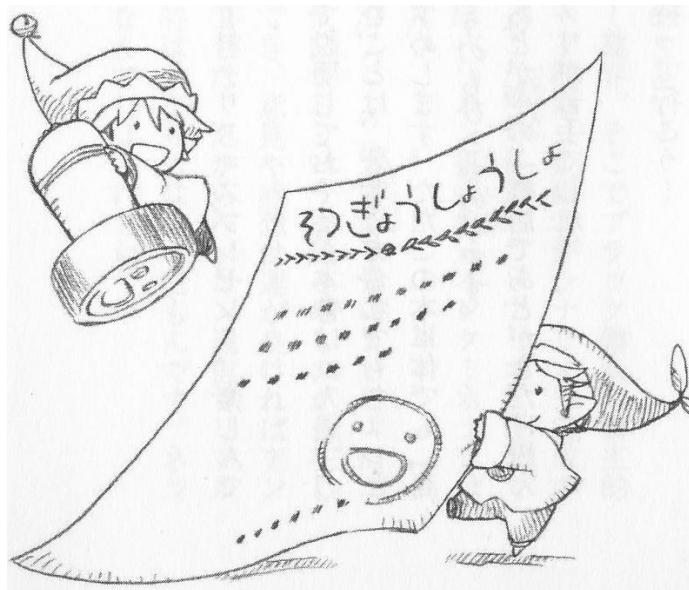
"Onee-chan, wake up. Please wake up! There's an extreme emergency. A real problem."

"Huh?"

I lifted myself up and found Shy Girl showing me a piece of paper.

"This blew in from the sky..."

Graduation certificate Congrats on your graduation! Wherever you might live at the moment!



"A graduation? Was that it?"

There was not a single fairy around us anymore. Perhaps they felt excessively hyper, perhaps it was simply their custom, but they had all vanished.

"Nee-sama, our school..."

Determined Boy's voice was frail and shaking.

"Oh dear oh my."

The school building, until then magically managed by the fairies, had lost its managers and utterly lost its color, as well. Though the building's structure had remained as it was, it had

instantly become a shoddily-kept, centuries-old or more place, one that would not surprise were it to collapse at any moment.

"What do we do, what do we do now?"

I hugged Shy Girl as she was on the verge of tears. The other children, too, uneasy on their faces they gathered around me. All of them had a graduation certificate in hand. But they had nothing else to them.

"You all here? Good. That will do nicely. Now then, you are to return to the dormitory and gather whatever material and travel equipment you can gather. My bag has a cooking set and a stove in it, boil some water with it. Then, for the moment, we shall have tea. It is all right. We will make do somehow! After all, we are all graduates. The fairies guaranteed me they will not perish no matter where in the village they went. So I am sure they will be all right. So after we have taken a break, you will be traveling alongside me. I was just about to return to my hometown, after all. We are at present attempting to revitalize our village, so I believe children will be happily welcomed. Let us walk on thinking of nothing but fun things, burst into song if you have to. That is why, please, wipe your tears and—"

Afterword

The collection of short stories about Humanity Has Declined has been released. I would be happy to find that you are all enjoying this Christmas present.

There may be those among them that just browse in book stores who begin reading from the afterword, so I will explain: the present volume is a collection of stories that take place after the end of Jintai. Enjoying this volume without having read the main story would be difficult, even to me as the writer. I recommend starting out with volumes 1-9. But another way would be to buy this book beforehand because it will still make the bookstore prosperous and thriving.

Now that I say it, I'm not really good at being the type of person who, having as pattern a plethora of older light novels, would scream at whoever was reading the afterword to *just take this to the register already!*

But right now I'm completely fine with doing it.

You there, reading the afterword in the store, just take this to the register already!

This is a compilation work, and it's a book that compiles the special stories I wrote back when this was turned into an anime, the odd chapters I've done as shop specials, and on top of that about 40% of it was written bespoke.

This was too easy, can you forgive me?

I inherit the blood of corporate drones, so I am racked by guilt. But I got over it. Still, it was truly racking... if we make another I swear it will be all written bespoke. After all, we got nothing left to reprint.

After completing nine volumes, I for the first time in a while searched for my own name. I thought I should maybe have a glance at the impressions, just in case. Thank you for all your thoughts and reviews.

Searching for my name made me remember when I was a beginner.

A beginner, yes... back when I debuted as a game writer.

I found myself in the New World of Eroge, where I landed when I decided that what I was going to do of my own free will was to become a writer. Then I worked Black (a nasty term meaning I was a subordinate that was forced to do overtime of my own free will), and past that, I finally got able to do my own planning and scenario writing, where I finally was able to make a product that was the talk of PC BBSs (the Internet wasn't widespread back then).

This concept, that of users talking about the scenario, had a serious impact on me. The very concept of online reviews did not exist, so that self-awareness of fretting after user impressions itself did not exist. Reviews were the only thing that decided sales, so opinions and impressions were at best gatherable via answers to a questionnaire, that was about it as far as what we were conscious of. Therefore, viewing opinions in real time via PC communication was a stimulating experience, but in truth it weighed heavily on my mind. Of course, that's the normal for those who have debuted in this 'net age.

As for what, besides getting reviews of my work, motivated me to decide to be a professional writer, that was purely the fervor of wanting to write, nothing else. Also, the terrifying memories of breaking my fingers on a packed train when I was younger leading to a strong dislike towards commuting during rush hours. I never ever wanted to become a salaryman. And I was able to regain that pure, initial, good feeling about all this. Thank you, all of you. This will all sustain me and make me do my best even hereafter.

Speaking of the hereafter, about my new work.

It's what's posted in the *GaGaGambaru 2015* page itself currently posted on the front of the official homepage of GaGaGa. This new work gave me a real bit of trouble.

I have written a book of sword and magic fantasy.

And so the time had come when I had written my own fairy tale.

Now that I notice, it looks like we're in a Fantasy Boom, right.

I did hear how booms come and go, but, to tell the truth, what I wanted was something that moved you deeply at a glance. However, I could not exactly think about something like that, and since the middle, high, and university students who support the trend would almost entirely be replaced by younger generations in ten years, making it as obvious as the Earth revolves that popular things revolve back to their start. That's something I'm thankful for. I shall write about it.

As for what it's about, it's a tale of strong crudeness similar, but not ripped off from, *Lodoss Island* and *Fortune Quest*. I call it crudeness, but it's not like it's a harsh one where, say, there's dead characters right off the bat, so be at ease. If there's any ripoffs, it's at *Berserk* levels. Besides, I tried to present the protagonist as one of those super-strong types that are popular these days. Does that equal to a victory even in sales?! Hah hah hah! Hah hah... like that'd ever happen. Well, I wrote it plainly and playing to my strengths, so I think that will do well enough. Feel free to help me attain that success.

I'd like to publish another collection of *Jintai* shorts if I ever see the chance.

And that all leads to me leaving it at that.

This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.

First Publishing Overview

Stories 1-5... bespoke

Stories 6-8... shop special Side Story Papers, 2012

Story 9... Anime BD/DVD special short story, 2012

Stories 10-14... Anime BD/DVD special short stories, 2013